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ABSTRACT

These five commissioned papers explore the relationship between educational reform and parent and community involvement for middle-grade education. The papers are: (1) "Comprehensive Districtwide Reforms in Parent and Community Involvement Programs" (Nancy Feyl Chavkin), on the resources and skills that school districts already have and those they can develop to improve parent and community involvement and increase students' educational success; (2) "School Restructuring to Facilitate Parent and Community Involvement in the Middle Grades" (Janet H. Chrispeels), on five major issues regarding how to change or restructure middle schools and middle-grade education to involve parents and community in students' learning; (3) "School and Family Partnerships in the Middle Grades" (Joyce L. Epstein and Lori J. Connors), presenting an overview of middle-grade students, families, and schools as well as a theory and framework to help build successful partnerships; (4) "Activities in the Home that Support School Learning in the Middle Grades" (Diane Scott-Jones), on homework as the focus of home learning activities in the middle grades and four levels of parental involvement--helping, valuing, monitoring, and doing--from a lifespan human development perspective; and (5) "Bringing Schools and Communities Together in Preparation for the 21st Century: Implications of the Current Educational Reform Movement for Family and Community Involvement Policies" (Patrick M. Shields), on the implications of the current reform agenda for governmental policies concerning the involvement of communities, families, and parents. Each paper includes references. (HTH)

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Commissioned Papers

Evaluating Education Reform:

Parent and Community Involvement in the Middle Grades

PS 022351

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COMPREHENSIVE DISTRICTWIDE REFORMS IN PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT PROGRAMS

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Comprehensive Districtwide Reforms in Parent and Community Involvement Programs

> It lies within our reach, before the end of the twentieth century, to change the futures of disadvantaged children. The children who today are at risk of growing into unskilled, uneducated adults, unable to help their own children to realize the American dream can, instead, become productive participants in a twenty-first-century America whose aspirations they will share. The cycle of disadvantage that has appeared so intractable can be broken (Schorr, 1988, p. 291).

In *Within Our Reach: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage*, Lisbeth Schorr provides compelling evidence that we have the requisite resources and skills to alter the future. This paper examines one part of Lisbeth Schorr's challenge to us--the role of school districts in reforming current parent and community involvement in education. The focus is on identifying both the resources and skills that school districts already have and those resources and skills that school districts can develop in order to increase educational success for all students.

This paper is divided into six parts. Part I presents the definition and guiding questions that introduce the topic of districtwide reform along with a discussion of the importance of key people who share a common vision for change. Part II reviews the research about parent and community involvement. Part III describes two key facilitating factors found in districts with promising parent and community involvement programs: policy and support for policy. Part IV considers the critical issues of allocating budgets and resources, assessing outcomes, and the collaboration process for parent and community involvement programs. Using case studies from middle-schools, Part V reviews ways districts can enhance parent involvement. Part VI discusses both recommendations and further issues for school districts for improving parent and community involvement.

Part I: Introduction

The issue of comprehensive districtwide reform in parent and community involvement at the middle-school level is a complex topic. This paper begins the discussion with a definition of comprehensive parent and community involvement. Then the paper focuses on important questions that guide the reform movement, key people in the reform process, and a clear statement of the vision needed for districtwide reform.

Definition. Comprehensive districtwide parent involvement programs are defined as programs that emphasize a variety of educational roles for parents in various schools throughout the community, particularly in schools with many students who are educationally at-risk. These parental roles might include volunteering in schools and classrooms, perhaps along with other members of the community, sitting on school governance and advisory boards, participating in parent/teacher organizations, and learning how to enrich the home learning environment. Collaboration with businesses and community service agencies, such as flextime for school conferences and referrals for parents' health and employment needs, are other possibilities. From such a set of options, parents can choose activities which best suit their circumstances. Such comprehensive programs might use innovative methods of communicating with parents, provide information to parents on various educational and child development issues, recruit and use volunteers in new ways, and in other ways make the programs attractive to different kinds of parents.

Guiding Questions. The questions confronting districtwide reform are significant because the answers to these questions guide the nature of the reform. These questions include:

1. What are key characteristics of model approaches to districtwide parent and community involvement? How do these new or reformed approaches differ from traditional practice or from prior practice?
2. What are supports and barriers to districtwide parent and community involvement programs?
3. To what extent do districtwide written parent involvement policies lead to changed behaviors and practices?
4. How do federal, state, and local policies, programs, budget priorities, and resource allocations affect district parent and community involvement programs?
5. How can federal state, and local agencies be encouraged to collaborate in the development of a cooperative districtwide approach to family support and parent involvement?

6. What specific guidance from a systems perspective can facilitate understanding of how to reform/enhance districtwide programs of parent and community involvement?

7. What strategies and approaches have been developed to assess the impact of districtwide parent and community involvement programs?

8. What are the outcomes of the new or reformed districtwide parent and community involvement programs for parents, students, school administrators, teachers, other school staff, and community residents?

Finding the answers to these questions and others will be an ongoing process and will require the commitment of key people with a common vision of successful schooling.

Key People and Common Vision. Administrators and teachers are always quick to point out the many barriers to effective districtwide reform of parent and community involvement. Their lists usually begin with a plethora of grim statistics about poverty, underachievement, school dropouts, teenage parents, substance abuse, homelessness, and other societal problems. Research supports the correlation between these statistics and educational achievement (Levy & Copple, 1989). The plight of these families and the reality of these students' social systems is nothing new to district administrators and teachers who see these facts as major hindrances to parent and community involvement.

There is another perspective one can take on these crises occurring within our educational, health, welfare, and justice systems: these crises within our social systems help remind us daily of the failures of our current system of piecemeal efforts. All of our current systems function in isolation, and these multifaceted crises in our educational and social systems demand a convergence of reform now. Levy and Copple (1989, p. 1) call this "a propitious time for collaboration because education and human services face common challenges as they try to help the same people and respond to the same problems."

These crises have caused leaders from diverse fields to "join forces" in the reform movement. James Coleman (1991) calls for "the rebuilding of social capital" by schools when the social capital of the family and community is weak. The Council of Chief State School Officers (1989) says "the time is ripe" for "comprehensive family support, education and involvement efforts." The National Coalition for an Urban Children's Agenda (1991) is asking schools and communities to define "desirable outcomes for children" because its ten members are deeply concerned about the plight of urban children and families.

A recurrent theme in all these reports is that school districts can not solve the problems of today's students alone. Collaboration with parents and community is imperative. Many people automatically assume that the key people in the reform effort are either at the state department of education level or are school district personnel such as principals, superintendents, and school board members. We must recognize the importance of another group of constituents--parents and community members. They are key people in the reform process. Districts must develop a common vision that is shared by families, community members, and educators. This vision must be grounded in a social systems perspective that recognizes the importance of working together for the educational success of all students. Educational reform, and especially reform in the area of parent and community involvement, must include people both inside and outside the school. At the middle-school level, these key people are school administrators, teachers, parents, community members, and the students themselves.

The conceptual framework of the whole student as part of a larger social system that extends beyond the school and the family to the community is being welcomed in districts across the nation. Educators are realizing that they can't do it alone. Districts cannot fix the problems of health, hunger, and unemployment, but they can collaborate and help students and families get services. Just changing the structure of schools and the academic curriculum is not enough; districts need to have a common vision that emphasizes reaching out to parents and the community and using the resources within the home and community to help students. Any vision that does not include reaching out to

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families and communities is a limited vision that is failing to look beyond the school building at the needs of the whole child and the community.

The importance of key people and a common vision can not be overstated. It doesn't matter exactly where the efforts for districtwide parent and community involvement begin. These efforts can be initiated by parents, by teachers, by superintendents, by principals, or by others. What is important is that key people promote and support parent and community involvement and that these key people develop a common vision with others in the school's social system. The common vision must include a broad view of the school that includes the community as an important part of its social system.

This paper continues to examine key issues surrounding the guiding questions, key people, and a common vision by reviewing the research and practice literature. Next the paper describes two facilitating factors found in districts with promising parent and community involvement; these two factors are districtwide policy and support for policy. The paper discusses critical issues concerning budgets/resource allocations, assessment of outcomes, and the collaboration process. Case studies at the middle-school level provide specific examples of how districts are reforming parent and community involvement. There are no easy answers or shortcuts to the development of districtwide parent and community involvement. Each district must harness the skills of key people and develop its own common vision for a successful school that reflects the specific community where the school is located.

Part II: Research Background

Research tells us that parents and community members are part of the rich resources and skills that each school district has. Walberg's (1984a) synthesis of 2,575 studies of academic learning reveals that parents influence key determinants of cognitive, affective, and behavioral learning. Henderson's *The Evidence Continues To Grow: Parent Involvement Improves Student Achievement* (1987) summarizes 49 research studies and documents the incontrovertible fact that parent involvement increases student achievement. The research has demonstrated that all children benefit from family involvement in education.

Furthermore, there are other important benefits of family participation in the schools. Chavkin (forthcoming), Rich (1985), and Sattes (1985) found that parent involvement in education helped produce increases in student attendance, decreases in the drop-out rate, positive parent/child communication, improvement of student attitudes and behavior, and more parent/community support of the school. Swap (1987) discussed the benefits that both parents and teachers reap from collaboration. She reported that collaboration broadens both parents' and educators' perspectives and brings additional resources to both groups. Nardine (1990) discusses the reciprocal benefits for parents who are involved in their children's education. He cites specific examples of the mutually reinforcing effect that parents and children have on each other's educational outcomes and suggests that involving parents in the educational process is an asset.

These beneficial effects of parent involvement in education have been reported from early childhood through high school. Rhoda Becher's (1984) review of the literature on parent involvement in early childhood education supports the notion that parent education programs improve children's language skills, test performance, and behavior. Berla, Henderson, and Kerewsky (1989) advocate for more middle-school involvement because this age period is such a critical time in adolescent development. Dornbusch and Ritter's study (1988) found parents of high school students a neglected resource.

Chavkin and Williams' study (1987) found that more than 70% of both superintendents and school board presidents believed it was the school district's responsibility to provide a policy and guidelines for involving parents in their children's education. Parents' responses were very similar to administrators' responses. Most parents wanted the school to take the lead in parent involvement and give them ideas about working with their children, particularly in the area of homework. In short, both parents and educators want school districts to provide policies and supports for parent involvement in education.

With both groups in favor of parent involvement, it would seem that schools would have more parent involvement than they do now. The reason for infrequent parent involvement is not clear. Sometimes it is the result of a stereotypical view of parents and the erroneous assumption that they don't care about their children's education (Chavkin, 1989). Unfortunately, parents are often typecast as indifferent to parent involvement when they do not participate in traditional parent/school activities.

According to James Comer (1986), parents' lack of participation in traditional parent/school activities should not be misinterpreted as a lack of interest in their children's education. He points out that many parents don't participate in traditional parent/school activities such as PTA meetings because they feel uncomfortable at the school. Comer's work with the New Haven schools reveals that parents often lack knowledge about school protocol, have had past negative experiences with schools, and feel unwelcome at a middle-class institution. Because of racial, income, and educational differences, parents are reluctant to become involved in the schools.

Comer suggests that just inviting parents to school is not enough; parents need clear mechanisms for involvement and district programs must be restructured to attract parents who have been reluctant to involve themselves in the school. Comer (1988, p. 42) concludes: "Schools must win the support of parents and learn to respond flexibly and creatively to students' needs."

All students could benefit prodigiously from effective approaches to parent involvement in education. It is not appropriate to place the blame for illiteracy and dropouts solely on the home or solely on the school. As Davies (in press), Seeley (1989), and Chavkin (1990) suggest, the solution to these educational problems requires collaboration among a wide range of community entities with families and schools as the central partners in the process of education. Community organizations, businesses, health care institutions, and social service agencies are all important in the educational process, and a positive relationship between parents and schools is essential.

Clearly, districtwide reform of parent and community involvement is a crucial part of the change that needs to takes place in the United States if we are going to break the cycle of disadvantage. Regardless of the communities they serve, all school districts can develop effective programs to involve parents in the education of their children. James Comer's (1988) work, which began with the Yale University Child Study Center and two inner-city schools in New Haven, Connecticut and now includes more than 50 schools around the country, shows that supportive bonds between home and school can increase academic achievement and improve attendance and discipline without any change in the socioeconomic makeup of the schools. Herb Walberg's (1984b) examination of 29 studies on family involvement in education found that participation in parent involvement in education programs is twice as predictive as socioeconomic status.

Research tells us that school districts with policies about parent involvement have more parent involvement. In the Chavkin and Williams' study (1987), researchers found that the existence of formal, written policies about parent involvement led to increased parent involvement activities. Policies about parent involvement in education and support for these policies about parent involvement in education are two key facilitating factors. Part III of this paper will examine policy and support for policy.

Part III: Policy and Support for Policy: Two Key Elements in Districtwide Reform of Parent Involvement

Williams and Chavkin (1990) used a key informant approach to identify and describe the essential elements of promising parent involvement programs in five southwestern states. These essential elements begin with two key components: written policies and administrative support for parent involvement. The other elements all fit under the general umbrella of ways school districts help support educators working with families. These additional elements include: training for staff and parents; a partnership approach in every aspect of programming; two-way communication; networking within and outside the district; and evaluation. In each case, the school board set the official district policy on parent and community involvement and then provided administrative support for policy implementation. Individual schools within the district developed their own strategies for implementation with support from the central office as necessary.

The word *policy* often means different things to different people. For the purposes of this paper *policy* means the formal, written policies of the school district. These are the policies on which the school board takes an official vote. This paper uses the phrase *school district policies* to mean rules and regulations that are written down, officially approved by the Board of Education, and followed by all in the district.

This paper uses the word *support* in the traditional sense of sustaining or upholding something. Support is considered during three different stages of policy--development, implementation, and maintenance. Support is what helps a policy come into formal existence (development), what helps a policy translate into practical actions (implementation), and what helps us maintain the policy (maintenance).

The Institute for Responsive Education's research (Davies, 1987) points out that because school districts have unique features which make them resistant to change, policies about parent involvement are necessary. The goals of schools as organizations are diffuse; the method of goal achievement is fragmented and responsibility is diffused among administrators, counselors, teachers, families, and students. In addition, the informal norms of schools are powerful, and the formal structure is complicated and not always well-coordinated. These organizational realities make the idea of parent involvement in education an idea that is both difficult to introduce and maintain without a formal, written policy. Davies (1987) makes a recommendation that a mandate or policy for parent involvement is essential. His work and the study by the Institute for Responsive Education clearly show that policy is a critical element if the natural organizational resistance to change is to be overcome.

The National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE) is dedicated to the development of family/school partnerships. This group of organizations used their broad and diverse experiences in working with teachers, administrators, families, and community leaders to develop general policy suggestions. Based on the assumption, that all parent involvement policies are developed with input from teachers, administrators, parents, students, persons from youth-serving groups, and the community, NCPIE suggests that all policies should contain the following concepts:

- Opportunities for all parents to become informed about how the parent involvement program will be designed and carried out.
- Participation of parents who lack literacy skills or who do not speak English.
- Regular information for parents about their child's participation and progress in specific educational programs and the objectives of those programs.
- Opportunities for parents to assist in the instructional process at school and at home.
- Professional development for teachers and staff to enhance their effectiveness with parents.
- Linkages with social service agencies and community groups to address key family and community issues.
- Involvement of parents of children at all ages and grade levels.
- Recognition of diverse family structures, circumstances and responsibilities, including differences that might impede parent participation. The person(s) responsible for a child may not be the child's biological parent(s) and policies and programs should include participation by all persons interested in the child's educational progress.

But policies alone are not enough. Davies (1987) says policies only provide the framework; polices need to be supported by mechanisms for monitoring, enforcing, and providing technical assistance. District support for parent and community involvement must occur during three critical stages. These stages are: (1) the development stage; (2) the implementation stage; and (3) the maintenance stage. Each of these stages is critical to ensuring the effectiveness of policy about parent and community involvement.

Based on information from actual programs, the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE) and the National School Boards Association (1988) recommend several supports for policies for involving parents in school activities during the development phase. These begin with assessing parent needs and interests about ways of working with the schools and setting clear and measurable goals with parent and community input. The understanding of what a true partnership means is critical during this first stage. School districts need to see parents and community members as equal partners and seek their input. Districts need to take the leadership role and reach out into communities and actively seek the involvement of parents and community.

Once a policy is adopted, school districts need to successfully implement the policies through a strong support system. NCPIE's keys to success at the implementation stage include a variety of strategies. Some suggestions that have worked for districts include the following:

- Hire and train a parent liaison to directly contact parents and coordinate parent activities. The liaison should be bilingual as needed and sensitive to the needs of parents and the community, including the non-English speaking community.
- Develop public relations to inform parents, businesses, and the community about parent involvement policies and programs through newsletters, slide shows, videotapes, and local newspapers.
- Recognize the importance of a community's historic, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural resources in generating interest in parent participation. Even when there are problems, such as desegregation issues, a parent involvement program can serve as a forum for discussion and a conduit for change.
- Use creative forms of communication between educators and parents. This may include parent/teacher conferences which yield individual parent/child and teacher/child plans, and newsletters mailed to parents.
- Mobilize parents as volunteers in the school assisting teachers with instructional tasks, assisting in the lunchroom, and helping with administrative office functions. Parents might act as volunteer tutors, classroom aides, and invited speakers.

- Train educators to include techniques for surmounting barriers between parents and schools so that teachers, administrators, and parents interact as partners.

The maintenance stage follows the coming together of the partnership and the establishment of an official group; the maintenance stage focuses on working together with all partners. The work is not done after policies are developed and implemented. In fact, most partnerships report that very difficult tasks occur during the maintenance stage.

After implementing policies about parent and community involvement, it is essential to enhance the success of policies during the maintenance stage. NCPIE makes the following three recommendations. First, integrate information and assistance with other aspects of the total learning environment. Parents should have access to information about such services as health care and nutrition programs provided by schools or community agencies. Second, schedule programs and activities flexibly to reach diverse parent groups. Third, monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of parent involvement programs and activities on a regular basis.

It is important to be aware of the factors that may inhibit districtwide reform through policies and supports for policies. Critics of parent involvement policies/supports will state that the attitudes of the parents or the educators cannot be legislated. Others will argue that policies take too long to develop or district already has too many policies that no one pays any attention to. Still other critics will point to the need for a national family resource policy, not an individual school district policy (see Heath & McLaughlin, 1987).

Policies will not help if they are not supported at every level (federal, state, and local) and at every stage (from development through implementation and maintenance). Flexibility is being encouraged at the federal level, and state departments of education are currently changing their role from "state as regulator" to "state as facilitator" in order to help districts reshape parent and community initiatives to fit their own community. It is essential that school districts provide opportunities for broad input from parents, teachers, and community members and develop and support their own policies about parent and community involvement. Each district's policy needs to be individualized and should reflect its own community.

Part IV: Critical Issues in Policy and Support of Policy

Any discussion of districtwide reform must include consideration of three critical issues: budget/resource allocations, assessment of outcomes, and the collaboration process. Because these concerns are critical to support for policy about parent and community involvement, this paper addresses the issues at the local district level and the state and federal levels.

Budget/Resource Allocations. All districtwide reform efforts cost some money and the perennial question is, "Where will the money come from?" As Seeley, Niemeyer, and Greenspan (1991) write in *Principals Speak*, the answer can be found in the word *priorities*. Our schools, even in times of high expenditures, have not spent very much money on parent and community involvement. The United States Department of Education (1991) reports that using constant 1990 dollars, our schools have increased per pupil expenditures more than $3600 per pupil (from $1389 to $4992)in the last thirty-five years, and almost none of it has been spent on parent and community involvement. Although looking at the past does not correct the budget problems, it does serve as a guide for what schools could be doing. The word *priority* comes into play. If we really believe parent and community involvement are linked to student success, we must stop giving lip service to partnerships and allocate modest sums for staff development, outreach, and coordination activities.

Of course, some of the goals of parent and community involvement can be accomplished without new district dollars; resource reallocation can help. Teachers and staff can be reassigned and existing staff development time can be used for training on parent and community involvement. Additional funding can also be sought from local businesses and community groups. Foundations can be another sources of support.

Comprehensive Districtwide Reforms

State and federal funding are other possible sources of support. Seeley, Niemeyer, and Greenspan (1991) suggest that one promising place to look for funding is the use of federal Chapter I dollars because they have been increasing. They urge districts to review their priorities for the use of Chapter I funds and see whether continuing to spend dollars on remedial instruction is in the best interest of students. They suggest the dollars might be used more productively if they were invested in mobilizing home/school/community resources to help children. The recent U. S. Department of Education publication (1992) on flexibility in using Chapter 1 funds supports this idea, but Palanki and Burch (1992) report few programs are taking advantage of this opportunity.

In addition to Chapter I funds, there are other special funding sources to consider. These sources include special education funds, drug education funds, funds for at-risk youth, dropout prevention funds. Many of these funding sources welcome plans that include parent and community involvement.

Davies, Burch, and Johnson (1992) suggest that there is little reliable data about either the actual costs or funding sources of family/community/school activities. Districts in the League of Schools Reaching Out Project reported that they were spending local district funds, but further investigation revealed that the local funds are actually federal dollars channelled through districts.

Another important finding from the League of Schools Reaching Out Project was that the schools reporting comprehensive reaching out strategies also had a range of funding supports. These funding supports include dollars from federal, state, and district levels as well as private funds.

The role of local communities in funding for parent and community involvement can be a significant factor for many school districts. Not only are funds available from businesses and foundations, but social service and community agencies can pool resources, share space and staff, and exchange in-kind resources. There are a wide range of funding supports that can be used when the emphasis is placed on community. The options increase dramatically when districts broaden their vision to include the whole community and see students as part of a larger social system than home and school.

The National Coalition for an Urban Children's Agenda (1991) suggests that a major part of the budget/resources issue is that we are not effectively using the resources we have. Because of our past history of programmatic fragmentation, we are driven by a traditional view of funding that puts dollars for children in specific categories of programs. This categorical funding mentality divides program dollars vertically to address piecemeal concerns of drug use, teenage pregnancy, drop-out prevention, and remedial education. The result has been a duplicative and inadequate system. The Coalition suggests that more districts look at ways to decategorize money and address issues of the whole student and whole family. In some areas this change will require state and federal legislation.

Nardine and Morris (1991) studied the current status of state leadership, staffing patterns, funding, training, and technical assistance for parent involvement activities in all fifty states. They followed this study by another survey of state legislation, guidelines, and regulations dealing with parent involvement. The responsibilities for parent involvement were not comparable across states because states had separate divisions for federal programs like Chapter 1, migrant, and bilingual education. Often the staff only worked part-time on parent and community involvement. No state had the equivalent of one full-time person for parent involvement per $100 million dollars budgeted. Although some states have legislation suggesting parent involvement, most states have not made legislation about parent involvement or funding of parent involvement a high priority.

The issue of district funding for parent involvement cannot be addressed without mention of the inequities in school funding. The current school funding system favors wealthy districts because the bulk of school funding comes from local property taxes. Education dollars do not exist in places of greatest need such as our inner cities. Court cases are active across the nation, and many believe the time has come to develop a new finance system which means increased state funding and decreased emphasis on the property tax (NASBE, 1989b).

Assessment of Outcomes. If we want more budget/resource allocations for parent and community involvement, we must be clear about the outcomes of these activities. It is important to specify clear and measurable goals for districtwide parent and community involvement, and it is essential to go one step further and delineate how we will know when we have reached our goals. We must describe the outcomes we expect for parents, students, school administrators, teachers, school staff, and community residents. The National Coalition for an Urban Children's Agenda (1991) says we must specify the outcomes so we can track progress and judge whether districts are fulfilling their responsibilities.

We need to look beyond inputs (who was served, what services were provided) and move toward examining outcomes. The Coalition suggests several indicators that districts might consider: health and well-being; development; deviant behavior; and satisfaction. It is a difficult process to define outcomes for partnership programs because they combine the elements of education, social service, and community activities. It is not an easy task, but it is an important challenge.

After defining outcomes, it is necessary to measure them. Assessment is nothing new to educators; teachers use assessment daily. In this paper we have already talked about assessment as a key component of the policy development stage and the policy maintenance stage. Assessment is definitely a major component of supporting parent and community involvement policy. Palanki and Burch (1992) suggest seven ways districts can evaluate whether their policies about parent and community are effective. They suggest policies need to be evaluated by looking at flexibility, intensity, continuity, universality, participation, coordination, and comprehensiveness.

Assessment will need to undergo quite a bit of change from our usual understanding if it is truly going to measure outcomes. Most of the current assessments used by districts measure inputs rather than outputs. Assessments in current parent and community involvement programs typically count how many people attended instead of measuring the quality of their interactions with the school; quality is at least as important as quantity. Some districts are now incorporating assessment about parent and community involvement in the annual performance reviews of both teachers and administrators. Changes in attitudes and perceptions of both parents and teachers should occur and be measurable. A "vignette" approach and other qualitative measurement techniques may work best and also provide the most insight for districts. Districts need to continue to develop accountability systems that accurately assess outcomes for collaboration and coordination activities.

Heath and McLaughlin (1987) call for a national child resource policy. They argue against a narrow view of the outcomes of schooling as academic achievement and propose that there are other important nonacademic outcomes such as social competence, physical and mental health, formal cognition, and emotional status. In addition to arguing against a narrow conception of outcome, they suggest that schools are relying on outdated assumptions about the role of families and schools. Demographic, cultural, and ethnic realities in American families have altered the idealized, nuclear family of yesterday. Heath and McLaughlin call for a broader view of both strategies and institutions to help children succeed and suggest that school districts need to shift to a collaborative mode and focus on identifying and coordinating the social networks of students.

Collaboration Process. Districts must work with all aspects of the community to ensure that students and their families have access to needed health and social services, employment, food, and housing so that they come to school ready to learn. Whether schools link students and their families to needed services or whether these services are provided at the school will require new roles and commitments (NASBE, 1989a, 1989b). Districts need to be sensitive to racial, ethnic, and economic differences, as well as language and literacy obstacles because insensitivity inhibits both communication and collaboration. Too often this lack of sensitivity prevents effective interaction with families and the community.

School districts will have to provide training for staff to learn to coordinate with staff in other systems. Districts will need to examine existing job descriptions and reward systems. There needs to be a wide range of activities, service directories, and resource materials available at the school. Districts have to look at the possibility of locating some community services or community personnel in school buildings. Districts will want to hire parent and community coordinators to link families with the school and community services. Sometimes this person will be a professional social worker trained in community organization and working with families; other times the person will be a long-time member of the community.

Whenever possible, districts need to work with nearby teacher-training institutions to assure preservice training in parent and community involvement and the collaboration process. Higher education institutions may also be able to provide districtwide in-service training that meets the needs of local teachers, community members, and parents.

In addition, districtwide partnerships with business and industry can be an important part of the collaboration process. Businesses can contribute in a wide variety of ways (e.g., employee mentorships with individual students, participation in the classroom, providing "real-world" challenges and fun, providing release time for employees and parents to attend to school matters during regular work hours, helping students explore possible career options).

It is difficult to get collaboration programs underway. There are many barriers because each system has a different governance structure. There are often conflicting regulations and time schedules. Professional practices such as intake forms, budget cycles, confidentiality rules, and reimbursement plans are often contradictory and cause disagreements (Cohen, 1989a, 1989b).

These differences are not insurmountable, but it does take school districts time to work these problems out with other agencies. Superintendents and principals are key people who can exert leadership in this collaboration process; they can be the guiding force that makes collaboration work. Collaboration programs can be successful when there is a strong district policy and support for the policy about parent and community involvement.

The need for cooperation among systems at the federal, state, and local levels is well-established. Districts need support from state and federal agencies so that collaboration programs can work. The fragmentation of local communities is mirrored at the state and federal level. Very often there are numerous federal and state agencies with policies and programs that overlap, but these programs don't coordinate with each other. Federal and state agencies need to be modelling the collaboration process for local districts. These federal and state efforts can establish direction and tone, as well as provide model policies and strategies that can readily be adapted at the local district level. Often leaders at state departments of education are well-positioned to serve as catalysts for statewide reform in parent and community involvement and can help local districts develop their own districtwide reform efforts.

Part V: Case Examples and Analysis

This part of the paper examines effective ways that districts can enhance parent and community involvement. The focus is on parent involvement in middle-schools because the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development's report *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* (1989) indicates that this is the typical time that involvement starts to decrease and seems more difficult than at the elementary level. Epstein (1986) reports that by the middle-school years parent involvement has decreased significantly and in some cases is nonexistent.

Berla (1991) believes that there are several barriers to parent involvement at this age level, including the impersonal structure of the middle-schools, the attitudes of students who are striving for independence from parents during early adolescence, and the attitudes of school staff that parent involvement is not as important as when the student was younger. The following examples from middle-schools are descriptions of promising approaches to districtwide reform. This section presents the key characteristics of these effective programs and what the districts have learned about promising reforms at the middle-school level.

San Diego City Schools

San Diego City Schools was the first district in California and the first large urban district in the nation to have a comprehensive policy about parent involvement approved by the school board. The district's Parent Involvement Task Force is a broad-based group of parents, community representatives, and district staff who developed this policy and serve as an advisory group to the district on ongoing districtwide parent involvement activities. The overall responsibility for implementation of the policy was assigned to the Community Relations and Integration Services Division which has contained a Parent Involvement Department since 1989. The Parent Involvement Department has a coordinator and two resource teachers who provide coordination to district-level efforts in parent involvement and provide technical assistance to schools as they develop parent involvement programs at school sites.

Three major support activities have helped implement and maintain the district's parent involvement policy. These are staff development, partnership development, and follow-up activities.

In the area of staff development, the Parent Involvement Department provides technical assistance (materials, planning/evaluation assistance or resources) and training sessions on program planning, home/school communication, parent/teacher conferences, and home visits. The department also publishes a quarterly newsletter to build staff awareness about the importance of parent involvement and has a parent involvement handbook that is presented to all new administrators each year. Special workshops are given for new principals, for leadership candidates, bilingual teachers, and counselors.

In the area of partnership development, the Parent Involvement Department has a strong belief in comprehensive, systemically planned, and long-lasting programs. Contrary to popular perception that the level of parent involvement is determined by parent interest or apathy, San Diego's Parent Involvement Department believes the level of parent involvement is determined by whether or not appropriate strategies and structures are in place to facilitate the participate of parents. The department works to ensure that each school's programs respond to a variety of needs. For example, at the third annual countywide parent involvement conference, workshops were presented in English, Spanish, Lao, Cambodian, and Vietnamese. Staff provided assistance to conferences on the African-American Family and the Latino Family. *Family Reading, Parents Growing Together*, and other workshop programs are supported. Recently a bus has been purchased and will be staffed and used as a mobile Parent Resource Center for schools.

Another interesting component in the area of partnership development has been the Parent Involvement Incentive Grants. These grants were awarded to support the parent involvement policy by encouraging schools to develop promising practices and innovative programs that strengthen partnerships between home and school. Some of the grants were for innovative projects linking parents and specific curriculum areas, and others were for projects linking schools and community agencies. Some of the middle-school grants included: working with community agency to implement "Parenting your Teenager" workshop; linking with community agencies serving families from different cultures; hosting a conference for families of a middle-school and its feeder schools; developing and testing a community mentoring model; organizing a communitywide parent conference; working with community agency to promote involvement of the African-American community.

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The San Diego City Schools have also been active in the area of follow-up and support for parent involvement. The Parent Involvement Task Force continues to meet regularly and play an active role as an advisory group for policy implementation issues. Members have participated in the School Accountability Report Card and have been leaders in urging the district to establish translation/interpretation services for schools to enhance home/school communication. The district tries to link parent involvement activities to community resources and staff are working to build relationships with community groups in order to maximize benefits to students. The district is also working to link district parent involvement efforts to state and national resources and information.

The District has suggestions specifically tailored for the middle-school level in five areas of parent involvement (communication, support, learning, teaching, and advisory/decision making). For example, in the area of home and school support strategies, one suggestion is to organize a beginning-of-the-year Saturday Family Day where parents and students can learn about study skills, adolescent development, college preparation, family communication, healthy living, and also have student clubs raise funds on fun activities. In addition to the suggestions for activities at the middle-school level, the district guide also lists the expected outcomes for teachers, students, and parents.

More information about parent and community involvement in San Diego can be found in the following publications of the Community Relations and Integration Services Division: *Partners for Student Success: A Handbook for Principals and Staff* (Chrispeels, Fernandez, & Preston, 1991) and Report on Efforts to Build Home-School Partnerships and Announcement of Parent Involvement Incentive Awards (San Diego, 1991). Chrispeels (1991) discusses the California State Board of Education's policy, efforts of the San Diego County Office of Education (the intermediate unit of the educational structure), and activities in the San Diego City Schools.

Seattle Middle Schools

For two years the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) with support from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation worked in a partnership effort with ten middle-schools in the Seattle Public School District. This collaborative effort was a complex undertaking that was designed to initiate systemic change in a school district and in broader community institutions in a short time.

The project had three phases of planning, starting up, and implementing activities. During the planning phase, the objectives were: creating a vision of what middle-school education could look like in Seattle; initiating a broad-based planning process that would ensure support for reform at the district, community, and state levels; developing an action plan for systemic change; and enhancing staff development opportunities. The second phase consisted of creating a blueprint for action about how change would take place. The third phase involved piloting the recommendations in two Seattle middle-schools.

The creation of a broadly based group was a significant part of the reform effort. Participants on the Seattle Middle Schools Commission included representatives from the business community, the department of social and health services, parents, the state board and department of education, the middle-school principals' association, district staff, community-based organizations, and the Seattle Board of Education. The reason for this diverse group was the conviction that past reform efforts have not succeeded because the education community had not sufficiently engaged others in proposed reforms.

Another significant part of the project was the agreement from the very beginning that the budget line would include release time for teachers so they would be able to play a key role in guiding the project. During the second phase this budget commitment was extended to obtain a minimum of $100,000 of district funds per year for the next four years to support middle-school reorganization.

The district did not try to do everything themselves; networking was a key component of the reform effort. The project brought in resource people and materials to inform discussions and planning. Staff also linked the project with the State Board of Education, Governor's office, legislature, and State Department of Public Instruction.

Four key recommendations concerning school structure, organization, climate, and outside support are: (1) all middle-schools should be divided into smaller, more easily managed units called "houses"; (2) teachers should be organized into interdisciplinary teams; (3) schools should sustain the present Dropout Prevention Retrieval Program; and (4) the district should provide each middle-school with a parent/outside service coordinator.

The major activities that helped foster districtwide parent and community involvement began with the school board's official adoption of the Commission's recommendations. Then leadership teams were developed in each school with two schools being chosen to pilot the reforms.

The Commission created staff development programs for the leadership teams at all the schools. These staff development programs included preparations for working with adolescents and their families at the middle grades. A retreat was planned for problem solving, hearing from experts, and interacting with the superintendent.

Parent/outside service coordinators were hired to provide effective support for at-risk middle-school students. These coordinators provided support for all students but placed a special emphasis on potential dropouts and their families. The coordinators provided services such as home visits, tutoring, helping students deal with parents' substance abuse problems, and conducting parenting classes. The coordinators worked flexible hours including nights and weekends and were instrumental in providing personal attention to students and families.

Other key activities included piloting the plans for "houses" and interdisciplinary teams at two middle-schools and sustaining leadership within the district for middle-school restructuring by keeping it visible among teachers, principals, the business community, and the superintendent.

There were three activities directly related to evaluating the results of the project. First, the Oversight Committee was created to hear regular reports concerning project activities and to provide guidance. Second, semistructured interviews were conducted by NASBE staff during regularly scheduled site visits. Third, each school collected information on itself. These school portraits included: demographic information on students and staff; suspension, attendance, expulsion and retention data; achievement test data; student grouping practices; and school climate.

More information about the Seattle Middle-School Project can be found in a publication entitled *The Steps to Restructuring: Changing Seattle's Middle-Schools* (1989) by Janice Earle.

Alachua County Middle-School Family Service Center

In August 1990 the Family Service Center, a full-service school, opened at Lincoln Middle-school in Alachua County, Florida. The school is located next to a subsidized housing project and a majority of the racially mixed students qualify for free or reduced price meals.

The Center's goal is to address the major problems facing at-risk students and families by using the school site to bring together health, education, and social services. With the ultimate goal of increasing student achievement, the Center works to improve other factors of student and family well-being that influence a student's ability to be successful at school.

The director of the Center is hired by the school board and views herself as an advocate for empowering disadvantaged parents. Home/school communication is a major component of her job. To assess that services a family needs, a family liaison specialist conducts a needs assessment on site where eligibility for services is established. A plan is developed and progress is monitored.

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Services to families are provided both on-site at the school and off-site. Extensive interagency cooperation is critical to the success of the project. Using a holistic approach, the project provides both education and social services to students and their families.

The key people in the project include the principal of Lincoln Middle-school, two family liaison specialists, a nurse practitioner, a social worker/guidance counselor, after-school teachers, and clerical assistants. Other agencies provide the services of their staff on an in-kind basis. The school district is working in partnership with the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services, the University of Florida's College of Medicine, Santa Fe Community College, community social service agencies, city government, and county government.

Funding for this project comes from numerous sources. The city has contributed technical services and the property for site location. The state department of education, Head Start, Florida First Start, and Even Start have all contributed dollars.

The evaluation of the project is being done by a collaborative team from the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services, and the School Board of Alachua County. The team is looking for the achievement of the following objectives: increased student learning, increased student grade point average, gain in family involvement in school activities, reduced health problems related to behavioral disorders and substance abuse, increased efficiency and effectiveness for personnel and resources, reduced incidence of teenage suicide, reduced criminal activity, and assisting disadvantaged families with achieving economic and social independence. The evaluation component includes a control group of 80-100 middle-school students with similar educational and economic backgrounds not served by the Center.

More information about parent and community involvement in Alachua County can be obtained from a 1991 publication of the Council of Chief State School Officers entitled *Families in School: State Strategies and Policies to Improve Family Involvement in Education.*

Other Promising Districtwide Practices

Many districts across the nation are initiating parent and community involvement programs that contain promising practices; not all are labeled middle-school programs. Many of these practices are being adapted at the middle grades.

In McAllen, Texas, the district's parent involvement programs were originally administered under the auspice of federal programs such as Chapter 1, bilingual education, or migrant funding. By making parent involvement a districtwide effort instead of a special program effort, the district's parent and community efforts have grown tremendously. Because the district integrated its parent involvement efforts into the regular school program, all support personnel for parent involvement are supervised by a centrally located administrator. Each school has its own home/school partnership program that is supported at the district level. Many of the services provided to parents are paid for by combining funding sources so that all parents may participate; the emphasis is on parent and community involvement for all families.

Some of the promising practices in McAllen include allowing teachers at a junior high two planning periods a day during which they may confer with parents or conduct home visits while an administrator teaches their classes. There is a weekly radio program in Spanish called "Discusiones Escolares" that encourages parents to become more involved in their child's education; parents can check out audiotapes of the radio show or videotapes of other parent meetings.

In Illinois, the State Board of Education established a major objective of improving the education of at-risk children and youth through collaborative partnerships. The Urban Education Partnership Grants program, although school-based in its present form, has accomplished major changes with relatively low costs. The program uses money from Chapter 2 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981 and requires that each grant have the participation of the principal, the school staff, the parents, and a variety of partners from the community.

Comprehensive Districtwide Reforms

In a suburban junior high school with a racially diverse student body had declining test scores and only about 40% of the student body turning in homework, the Urban Partnership Grant had three components: a homework lab that was available to students two days a week; improvement contracts for individual students; and two kinds of videotapes. There were instructional videotapes on critical lessons in mathematics, English, social studies, and writing research papers and parent education videotapes on how to help motivate students to learn.

The positive experience of this program has led districts to consider replicating the state's grant program. Local Illinois districts themselves are now offering multi/year grants so that schools are able to establish and stabilize their programs. The districts are examining the importance of multiple outcomes such as attendance, discipline, and level of parent involvement in addition to achievement.

In Indianapolis, Indiana, the emphasis has been on developing a multifaceted, districtwide parent involvement program that facilitates two-way communication enabling parents to stay in touch with the school and become partners with the schools in the education of their children. Called Parents in Touch, the program focuses on conferences, folders, Student/Teacher/Parent (STP) Contracts, and a weekly calendar. For the conferences, the district has arranged adjusted hours with the Indianapolis Education Association so that working parents can be accommodated and each school has a coordinator to schedule conferences. In addition to sharing report card information, assessing progress, and setting goals for students' achievement, the conferences are an opportunity to distribute parenting materials developed by Parents in Touch.

Teachers give middle-school parents folders at the first conference that contain school policies on homework and attendance, on grading procedures, and on dates for distributing report cards. The STP contracts are tailored to the needs of middle-schoolers and include information to help parents improve their interactions with their early adolescents. The contracts are prepared in triplicate so that the parent, teacher, and student each have a signed copy of the agreement. All of the middle-schools provide weekly calendars to students so that they can list their daily assignments in each class and enable parents to monitor their children's homework.

In New Jersey, the Linking Schools and Community Services Project has mobilized resources to address educational and social issues in two middle-school programs. With strong districtwide support from their respective districts, Camden Middle-school was chosen as the urban site and Woodruff School was the rural site for the pilot project. The emphasis of the program was on establishing cooperative relationships between schools and community agencies to address the multiplicity of social problems that children bring with them to the classroom. This project highly recommends that both school districts and agencies keep detailed logs of the collaboration process so that the networking process is an active, reciprocal process that focuses on the recurring themes of needs identification, resources identification, organizational issues, and project linkages. Each middle-school developed a different collaboration project, but the general process of focusing on recurring themes was the same.

More information about parent and community involvement in McAllen, Texas, can be found in D'Angelo & Adler (1991) and D'Angelo (1991). Chapman (1991) describes the Illinois experience, and Warner (1991) writes about the Indianapolis program. Robinson and Mastny (1989) describe the Linking Schools and Community Services Project in further detail. The Council of Great City Schools (1987), Davies (1991), Epstein and Salinas (1992), Filby and colleagues (1990), Goodson and colleagues (1991), Liontos (1992), and the Quality Education Project for Minorities (1990) also provide rich case examples of districtwide efforts to increase parent and community involvement.

Part VI: Recommendations for Districtwide Reform

The review of research and practice in this paper unquestionably points to essential elements of districtwide reform of parent and community involvement. All districts must have key people with a common vision who have a policy and support for policy about parent and community involvement in education. Clearly, policy alone is not enough; support for policy is critical for the development, implementation, and maintenance of districtwide parent and community involvement. Support for policy comes when a district has key people with a common vision of a successful school.

The school districts with effective reform programs at the middle-school level all had strong districtwide support for their programs. Many of the programs were developed and implemented at the school building level, but there was always a strong element of districtwide support for the program. Sometimes the support was the written policy; other times the support went beyond the written policy and came in the form of home/school coordinators, technical assistance, staff development workshops, mini-grants, newsletters, or videotapes. The support was tailored to local needs and interests, but every successful middle-school program was supported at the district level.

The programs described in this paper have used existing resource materials and developed new ones to help facilitate districtwide parent and community involvement. For example in response to the National School Board Association's (1988) recommendation that school districts conduct assessments on their community, families, and current policies before developing or revising policy about parent and community involvement in education, districts have used a variety of resources, including those developed by Cale (1990), Chrispeels (1988), and Henderson, Marburger, and Ooms (1986). In response to the call for more teacher training (Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Chrispeels, 1991), districts are using materials prepared by the professional associations.

In addition, the United States Department of Education (Moles, in press) is piloting a workshop series for educators on strengthening students' home learning; Chavkin's workshop discusses school district policies about home learning. This policy workshop offers an opportunity to examine specific school district policies about parent and community involvement. It also presents four case studies of ways school districts are supporting parent and community involvement. The workshop concludes with a district checklist and "Next Steps" plan of action.

As Epstein (1991) suggests, we have much to learn from current district efforts to connect schools, families, and communities to promote the success of children in school. Indeed, there are real possibilities. In *Promising Programs in the Middle Grades*, Epstein and Salinas (1992) cite numerous examples of promising programs that keep the families of middle grade students informed as well as involved in their children's learning. Leaders in federal and state government as well as national organizations are encouraging these kinds of home/school/community partnerships. Although there are many barriers, there are important steps that districts can take to catalyze, support, and reinforce parent and community involvement.

Ooms (1992) says that it may take both encouragement and mandates to establish strong districtwide programs. One thing for certain, however, is that policy can set the direction by clarifying the definition of parent and community involvement and setting priorities and guidelines for the various groups from home, school, and community. Districts will need to invest some resources; school boards need to consider new dollars and personnel and reallocation of existing dollars and staff. Reaching out to homes and communities is not the norm in most schools, and this paradigm shift, as Lueder (1992) and Seeley (1989) call it, requires that reform of parent and community involvement be a districtwide effort during the development, implementation, and maintenance of policy.

Oakes and Lipton (1990) call for unconventional policy initiatives that mobilize the commitment of families, schools, and communities to work together to improve education. They argue that new districtwide policies can marshal federal, state, and local resources to help school reform. They caution, however, that the reforms won't survive unless families, communities, educators, and policymakers work together over the long term to change beliefs and practices.

Comprehensive Districtwide Reforms

Barriers to comprehensive districtwide reform in parent and community involvement still exist, and it is critical that districts recognize these barriers and take steps to alleviate them. Ineffective communication between and among all stakeholders (administrators, teachers, and parents) is compounded at the district level by the number of middle-schools and feeder schools, the diversity of the neighborhoods, and the developmental changes of early adolescents. Another barrier is the inadequate training of administrators, teachers, families, and community members to work in the collaborative mode and to understand both the rationale and the "how to" of school/home collaboration. In addition to communication and training concerns, barriers include a lack of leadership among key administrators, unclear and limited vision of comprehensive parent and community involvement, and low budgetary priorities for parent and community involvement.

Addressing these barriers will take renewed effort and commitment; these barriers are "tough" issues that need to be raised. Districts need to have a reform mentality that helps them move beyond barriers to achieve the kind of parent and community involvement that is necessary for successful schooling. To meet Lisbeth Schorr's challenge is going to take major districtwide changes in key people, vision, policy, and support for policy. Oakes and Lipton (1990) suggest that three fundamental premises must underlie these districtwide changes. First, all schools need help. Second, some schools need more help than others. Third, good schools help all children. Clearly, change is within our reach. Districts can and must examine the ways they involve parents and community in education.

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SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING TO FACILITATE PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN THE MIDDLE GRADES

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Introduction

The middle-grade student represents a bundle of human energy undergoing rapid physical, psychological, intellectual, and social development that is akin to the first few years of a child's life. The titles of two recent reports about the middle-grades, *Caught in the Middle* (1987) published by the California State Department of Education and *Turning Points: Preparing Youth for the 21st Century* (1989), a report prepared by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, capture well these difficult years of growth and transition from childhood to adolescence. Pre-adolescents and young adolescents are indeed often *caught in the middle*--too old for childhood activities and too young for the adolescent world into which they are being pushed. These critical years represent key *turning points* in their lives. As the *Caught in the Middle* report states:

> For many students the middle-grades represent the last chance to develop a sense of academic purpose and personal commitment to education goals. Those who fail at the middle-grade level often drop out of school and may never again have the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential. (p. v).

The middle-grades typically refer to students in grades four through eight. Students in this age-span find themselves housed in a variety of school settings and grade configurations, such as K-8, 4-6, 5-8, 6-8, 7-8, 7-9, 7-12, and 4-12, to name a few (Epstein, 1992). The great diversity in the way middle-grade students are clustered complicates the job of schools in designing programs and approaches which will best meet these students' educational, social, emotional, and physical needs. As a result, a third level of schooling, which falls between elementary and high school has emerged to serve many middle-grade students (George, Stevenson, Thomason, and Beane, 1992). The majority of middle-grade students now attend separate middle or junior high schools typically serving grades 6-8, 7-8 and 7-9. For purposes of this paper, references to middle-grades and middle-schools will encompass and focus primarily on these grade configurations. The ideas and examples given, however, can be adapted by schools serving any middle-grade students.

School Restructuring

Middle-schools and a middle-school philosophy have emerged over the last twenty-five years as a means of responding to the needs of young adolescents during these exciting and turbulent years of growth and development. Studies that have helped to define the type of education needed by young adolescents include the two studies mentioned earlier, *Caught in the Middle* and *Turning Points,* as well as the work of Lipsitz (1984), *Successful Schools for Young Adolescents;* the National Association of Secondary School Principals' *An Agenda for Excellence at the Middle Level* (1985); and the recent Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development study, *The Middle School--And Beyond* (George, et al., 1992). These studies are very important for setting the context for schools to restructure and facilitate parent and community involvement in the middle-grades. The reports urge that families be more involved in the education of their young adolescent children and that schools need to be connected with their community. The critical issue is how to translate the recommendations from rhetoric into action. How do schools serving middle-grade students need to change or restructure to reengage parents and community in support of student learning and school success?

This paper addresses five major issues regarding how to change or restructure middle-schools and middle-grade education to involve parents and community in students' learning. First, a conceptual framework is presented for thinking about the ways parents, community, and school staff must work together in partnership. Second, several examples are given of how middle-schools are changing and restructuring parent involvement programs to reach out to parents and community. Third, emerging structures and instructional practices in middle-school reform are discussed and ideas presented on how these restructuring efforts could be used to connect more fully students, their families, and communities with schools. Fourth, the paper discusses potential staff development needs that must be addressed if teachers and school staff are to more actively involve and work with parents and community. Finally, the paper outlines further areas for research about family/school connections in the middle-grades.

Home/School/Community Partnerships: A Conceptual Framework

The reports about middle-schools recommend greater parent and community involvement; however, how to accomplish this goal is not spelled out with much specificity. The *Caught in the Middle* report points out that the successful transformation of a junior high to a middle-school usually resulted in greater overall parent involvement in the restructured school (George and Oldaker, 1985-86). One of the reasons for this increased involvement may be that teachers and principals, who are working to convert a junior high to a middle-school, often display an enthusiasm and commitment to change. The conversion process requires examining old relationships and practices, which allows the school to reevaluate relationships with parents as well. Another reason for the increased involvement may be that parents must be involved to sanction the conversion. The report also urges that schools serving middle-grade students recognize parent concerns about their children's emergence into adolescence. If these developmental concerns are recognized and dealt with openly, the report states, the distance between classroom and home will be diminished. The changing demographics, deterioration of inner city communities the diverse combinations of individuals that represent the modern family, however, require more than exhortations to increase parent involvement. It will take hard work, resources, and school changes to translate the policy rhetoric into school practices. Restructuring is required both within schools and in the ways schools, families, and communities work together to support students success in school, at home, and in the community.

From the research on parent involvement, it is clear that families and schools need to be connected in a variety of ways. There are critical roles that each play. The following typology of home/school/community partnership roles, built on the work of Lyons, Robbins and Smith, (1983), Epstein (1987a), and Chrispeels (1987, 1992), is offered as one way of thinking about the multiple ways that schools, communities, and families need to be linked. The typology forms [illegible] scaffolding on which to build a home/school/community partnership. The typology encompasses five mutual and interactive roles, which is the reason the concept and label of *co*-communicators, *co*-supporters, *co*-learners, *co*-teachers, and *co*-advocates, advisors and decisionmakers are used. First, the "*co*-" implies both school and family perform these roles. Sometimes these roles will be performed independently (e.g., both need to learn important information relative to their role, or both are involved in teaching, one primarily at school the other at home). Second, the "co-" implies that schools and families need to interact and work together to best support student learning and school success. The roles, depicted in Figure 1, are arranged in a pyramid and overlapping fashion to suggest that the roles build on each another. Communication serves as the foundation role and is pivotal to and impacts the successful implementation of the other roles. Each role is likely to involve fewer teachers, school staff, parents and community members than the previous role. To some extent the level of participation is also an indication of the increasing complexity of skills and knowledge required to fulfill the role.

Home and School as Co-Communicators. The co-communicators role is the most critical to all other partnership endeavors. Without adequate communication between families and school personnel, other partnership efforts are likely to falter. Furthermore, as the "*co*-" implies, the communication must be two-way. Both school and parents have information that is vital to children's success; however, the school, because of its power and authority, is in a stronger position to initiate, promote, and sustain home/school communications. The school can invite and encourage active communication or it can create barriers that make it difficult for parents to communicate. Epstein and Becker (1982) found a steady decrease in the communication between home and school and the degree of involvement of parents as students moved into the middle-grades. There are several reasons for this decline of home/school engagement and interaction. First, as students mature, they may be less reliable couriers as they make decisions themselves as to which information they will or will not share with their family. Second, given the increasing maturity and intellectual development of students, teachers may feel their primary focus of communication should be with the child, not the parent. Third, parents are likely to have less direct contact with the school as the children are able to get to and from school on their own. Fourth, teachers in the upper elementary grades and in middle-schools are usually much more reluctant to have parent volunteers in the classroom, breaking a channel of communication with parents and the community. Fifth, as students move into middle-schools and junior high schools, the school itself becomes a barrier to communication. The school is often larger and more impersonal in nature. Students frequently move from class to class working with several different teachers, making it more difficult for parents to stay in touch or to know whom to contact. Also, not all middle and junior high schools hold regularly scheduled parent/teacher conferences. In some schools, teachers are available for conferences when students and parents receive the first report card. Unless these conferences are well-structured, it is not always easy for parents to know with which teachers to meet. In the case descriptions that follow, examples will be given of how some middle-schools are trying to close the communication gap with parent centers, through the telephone, through special meetings in neighborhoods, and through hiring community liaison workers or teachers who have special responsibilities for community outreach.

Home and School as Co-Supporters. Like communication, home and school as cosupporters need to involve almost everyone at sometime during the school year in expressions of support. There are several dimensions to the concept of support. Traditionally, parent support for the school consisted of two critical aspects. The first aspect of support comes from parents fulfilling their basic parenting obligations by providing safety, shelter, food, clothing, nurturing, guidance, and love (Epstein, 1987a). The second dimension is parental support for the school in terms of volunteering to assist the school in clerical or chaperoning tasks, serving as room representatives, raising funds, participating in social activities, attending school events such as back-to-school nights, open houses, awards ceremonies, or student performances.

It is only in the last few years that schools are beginning to understand their role as co-supporters. The ever-increasing levels of poverty, the changes in families, especially the need for mothers to work, and the rise in the use and abuse of harmful substances such as drugs and alcohol, is changing the notion of support. To address these critical needs, schools now find themselves having to offer more support for families. Schools are being called upon to provide not only a safe and positive learning environment during the school day, but also to offer a safe environment before and after school hours. Schools cannot provide all the resources families need for their children to be successful in school; therefore, the school support role requires schools to collaborate with other social service, community, and government agencies in ways that have not previously occurred. The school support role for young adolescents requires both considerable thought and restructuring of traditional school roles and responsibilities. The case studies will illustrate innovative ways that the schools are providing support for families.

Home and School as Co-Learners. Through communications such as newsletters, open houses, progress reports and report cards, and parent workshops, schools have traditionally tried to help parents learn about school programs and how their children are achieving. The learning opportunities are usually unidirectional, with a focus on parents learning about the school. If parents and teachers, especially parents and teachers from diverse cultures, are to interact in new ways, the role of home and school as co-learners takes on new meaning.

The sporadic and infrequent communication typical of most schools serving middle-grade students does not allow adequate opportunities for mutual learning to take place. As children move into the middle-grades, there is much that both teachers and parents have to learn. Many parents feel ill-equipped, especially in their communication skills, as their children become teenagers. The problems of communication and parenting are further complicated for many inner-city parents who may have to deal with a culture in which they themselves were not raised. The problems of interface between home and school for immigrant families (and families in poverty who have never experienced success in school) is captured by Howard Gardner in his book *To Open Minds* (1989).

> My diligence at the piano was possible only because of the example of regularity and fidelity my parents displayed on every front. Yet at the same time, they felt inadequate to instruct me and Marion about the operation of school and other communal institutions, about how to interact with peers, about hobbies to pursue or scholastic choices to make. Nor could they model the behavior appropriate to an American parent: we had to take these from the pages of *Life* magazine, from the situation comedies of television, from the examples of our own teachers or our more Americanized friends and their families. Indeed, as the image of "reverse rearing" suggests, our parents looked to their children for clues about how to negotiate their way in this new land, for which they had no preparation. (p. 25).

If the school leaves it to the student to do the teaching of the parent about school life, the lessons may not always be ones that will well serve the family, student or school. The school needs to assume a more systematic approach to helping parents learn about the school, its programs and opportunities for their children, as well as about adolescent development and parenting practices that will foster a smooth transition during the middle-school years.

In addition, many teachers of middle-grade students find themselves equally ill-equipped to work with middle-grade students. Some were trained as secondary teachers with a strong focus on subject matter, not on adolescent development. Teachers working in multicultural settings also need to learn about the cultures of the students they are teaching and how to best work with families from such diverse backgrounds. Parents and students can help teachers acquire knowledge about their culture and can also be valuable resources for teachers on the student's interests and learning styles. Seeking out this information can help teachers to engage students and their families in more active learning processes both at school and at home. Greater knowledge about the students' culture and interests will help teachers recognize and validate parenting practices and family values from diverse cultures. Such recognition should help families from diverse backgrounds feel more comfortable in contacting the school and working with teachers. Only through more systematic learning opportunities for both teachers (which will be discussed more fully in the section on staff development) and parents, will schools help to reengage the family in support of student learning.

Home and School as Co-Teachers. Many of the reform reports, such as *A Nation at Risk* (1983), stress that parents are children's first teachers. The critical role that parents play in early language development and intellectual stimulation of children that prepares them to enter school ready to learn is well understood. The lack of active parent teaching in the early years creates learning deficits that schools struggle to overcome. Less well understood is the teaching role that parents play as students enter the middle-grades. Parents frequently feel less competent as teachers as their children move into middle and junior high schools. The sense of competence is greatly decreased if the child has not experienced much school success. Homework may become a battle ground if parents are unsure how to help and students do not understand the assignment. Once students enter the middle-grades, parents are much less likely to continue reading to their children, even if they actively enjoyed books together in the primary grades (Smith 1991). As students move into the middle-grades, peers and other adults, such as club leaders, coaches, or youth leaders at churches, also become important teachers; however, the teaching role of parents needs to be encouraged and supported.

Teachers play a critical role in either welcoming and reinforcing or in discouraging parents' teaching role at the middle-grade level. Creating opportunities for parents and community members to share information and their talents in the classroom, sanctions, and models a more active teaching role for parents at home. Yet, few middle-schools actively involve parents as classroom volunteers. The design of homework and home learning activities also can encourage or discourage the active participation of parents in their home teaching role. As some of the examples given below indicate, schools that support teachers to involve parents in the teaching process both at home and at school, also impact the nature and quality of the teaching at school.

Not all parents will be able to fulfill this role in ways that the school envisions, especially in the area of homework support. Therefore, this role requires special care and consideration so that students are not penalized by a parent's reluctance or feelings of inadequacy to be actively engaged. Community volunteers, college or peer tutors, adult mentors, and concerned teachers will all be needed as teachers to provide extended learning opportunities for some students.

Home and School as Co-Advisors, Advocates, and Decisionmakers. This role caps the pyramid. It is at the top or end of the continuum because it is a role in which not all parents or school staff may be involved, especially in the formal aspects of advising and decisionmaking. This role has three dimensions. The first is the governance role implied in the notions of home and school as co-advisors and decisionmakers. This role is fulfilled by teachers, school administrators, parents, and at the middle-school level, students when schools establish governance committees, school councils, Chapter 1 or Bilingual Advisory committees, ad hoc task forces, such as a discipline committee, or for a parent/teacher organization. While advisory committees have been a feature of schools since the passage of Title I legislation, both parents and teachers often feel ill-equipped to assume these leadership roles. As schools move to more extensive decision-making roles at the school site through site-based management proposals, more training and support are required for this role to be fulfilled successfully. Being in a formal governance role requires skills in group dynamics and organization. It also requires a vision that is broader than the immediate concerns for one's own child or classroom and a commitment to serving the whole school. Few teachers or parents are willing to take on these additional duties and responsibilities.

The second dimension of this role is the more informal way in which parents and teachers are co-advisors and co-decisionmakers. When parents and teachers meet to conference about a student, teachers frequently give advice to parents. (Teachers, sometimes, find it more difficult to accept advice from parents about teaching.) At the close of a conference, the teacher and family may mutually decide on a course of action, thus fulfilling the role of co-decisionmakers. In secondary schools, counselors and advisory teachers may also play critical roles in giving advice and deciding a course of action for both students and parents. The day-to-day role modeling, advising and decision making that occur both at school and at home shape and influence the course of student learning and their school success.

The third dimension of this role is that of *co-advocates*. An advocate, according to *Webster's Dictionary*, is one who speaks on behalf of another. Upper-middle-class parents have often played this role for their children, intervening at the school to ensure correct placement in a class, insisting on testing for giftedness or other special programs, and registering concerns about an assignment, grade or teaching practice. In contrast, parents who do not speak English, who themselves did not experience success in school, who are distanced from the school by poverty, or who are immigrants to this country, are less likely to be able to advocates for their children in the same way. While teachers are not always happy when parents become advocates for their children, the advocacy does establish a point of contact and potential for dialogue. The lack of contact between parents and teachers is often construed by teachers as parental apathy or disinterest in their child's school success. When teachers form these negative views about parental interest, they may also be forming negative and detrimental views about the child's potential for success in school (Johnson, Brookover, and Farrell, 1989). Occasionally teachers have played an advocacy role for some of their students, helping them to get needed services such as health care or tutoring. In crisis cases, counselors may step in as the child's advocate. Given the changes in family structures, increasing levels of poverty, especially among children, and the flood of immigrant families to the inner city, teachers as advocates is one role that may need much more attention and development, especially during the vulnerable middle-grade years.

Home/School/Community Partnership Models

This section of the paper uses the conceptual model presented above to examine some of the ways that schools have restructured or changed their practices to enhance home/school/community partnerships. Many of the practices described will fall into more than one role. For example, as parents learn about the school through improved communications, they will be in a better position to fulfill their teaching role and will be stronger advocates for their children. It is valuable, however, to highlight specific changes and actions that primarily typify one of the roles. Many of the examples presented below are drawn from three middle-schools in San Diego County that are working to develop partnership programs--Muirlands and Mann Middle Schools, both in San Diego Unified School District, and Montgomery Junior High in Sweetwater Union High School District. Other examples are included from a review of the literature on middle-school parent involvement programs. The examples given are meant to be suggestive of innovative ways schools are changing to meet the needs of parents. They do not reflect all that schools are doing to build partnerships.

School Practices that Enhance Home/School/Community as Co-Communicators. Muirlands Middle School, located in La Jolla, California, has had to rethink how it reaches out to parents. The school brings together two distinct student populations: the affluent resident population and a largely Hispanic student population bused to the school from a less affluent southeast San Diego neighborhood. The bused students are participating in the Voluntary Ethnic Enrollment Program (VEEP), part of San Diego's integration plan.

Mann Middle School is located in east San Diego and serves a diverse student population consisting of Hispanic, African-American, Laotian, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hmoung and White students. Mann Middle was faced with the problem of how to reach out to its very diverse community, especially when most of the school staff does not speak the languages [illegible] its students. Through a grant from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation both Muirlands and Mann have been working to close the language and cultural gaps between school staff and their diverse parent and student communities.

As Pumell and Gotts (1983) have shown, school newsletters at the secondary level represent an important communication link between home and school. Muirlands has always had a monthly PTA newsletter, however, the newsletter was not printed in Spanish. Initially the principal's message, key dates and one or two articles were translated; however, during a joint leadership development workshop for the PTA boards of Muirlands and Mann, representatives of each school's Hispanic parents strongly expressed the need for translating the entire newsletter into Spanish. As a result of this meeting, both schools now publish the entire newsletters in English and Spanish. Mann has not resolved how to publish the newsletter in all four of the Asian languages. Montgomery Junior High has also found that publishing its newsletter in Spanish is essential for communicating with its large Spanish-speaking parent population.

Booker T. Washington Middle-school in Baltimore, Maryland (Epstein and Herrick, 1991b) also turned to a school newsletter as a means of enhancing home/school communication. In addition to the regular principal's newsletter, a second newsletter was initiated "to make parents feel welcome to the school and to summarize key information about school programs and workshops held at the school for parents who did not attend" (p. 1). To find out how successful the newsletter was, the Parents and Teachers Project team conducted a random telephone survey of parents. The survey reconfirmed the importance of newsletters as communication vehicles at the secondary level and gave the team valuable information about how parents perceived the newsletters and ideas for improving the newsletter. In addition, the parents interviewed felt valued because their ideas were being solicited. This example shows that it is not only important to distribute a school newsletter to parents in their native language, but also to periodically check parent opinions about the newsletter, thus facilitating two-way communication.

Since all three San Diego County schools serve diverse ethnic populations, the schools have had to develop new means of communicating with parents. As part of its grant activities, Muirlands launched a new outreach effort in the fall of 1991. Ten parents from the VEEP community were asked to serve as community leaders. They in turn were each asked to select another parent whom they would mentor. Each parent leader agreed to attend bimonthly regional leadership meetings as well as the bimonthly VEEP meetings. They also agreed to call a list of 15 parents once a month to inform them about school events and solicit questions and concerns that could be brought to the monthly meetings. At the regional and VEEP meetings, each parent leader reported on his or her calls. This communication network represents an important beginning step in encouraging two-way communication. Attendance and interest at the monthly meetings has remained high throughout the year, although not all parents feel their points of view are being listened to by the staff.

An important outcome of this unique outreach has been more contact between home and school. As Spanish-speaking and VEEP parents have developed greater confidence, they have made more direct contact themselves with the school. The calls from VEEP parents increased 300 percent over the previous year. However, many of the VEEP parents still feel that the majority of the contacts they receive from teachers are negative in nature and focused mostly on homework, attendance, or discipline problems. A few teachers have begun to attend the bimonthly regional leadership or VEEP meetings, opening up the possibility for more parent/teacher dialogue. A Spanish-speaking community liaison and vice principal have facilitated communication between parents and the school. Both have been instrumental in developing the skills of the parent leaders.

While Montgomery Junior High has not had the support to establish such a systematic parent leadership development program as Muirlands and Mann, the home/school partnership coordinator identified key parent representatives of the different ethnic groups served by the school. She developed their leadership skills by regularly involving them in school and parent activities. These parent leaders assisted with telephone contact, recruited volunteers, organized parent meetings, and assumed many other responsibilities. As a result of the outreach by these parent leaders, an active, multiethnic volunteer core for the school has been established.

Mann Middle School has also recognized it is essential to have representatives from the different ethnic groups to assist with outreach to parents. Given the diversity of its parent population, it has been difficult to find effective leaders for each group. In the rush to identify representatives who can meet the translation needs of the school, a group that has been neglected are the African-American parents. Efforts are now under way to ensure that they feel included too. The teachers at Mann have also made a concerted effort themselves to reach out to parents through the telephone, a practice not found in the other two middle-schools. The PTA at Mann has supported the effort through funding additional telephones for the school. The school has adopted a policy that for every call a teacher makes to address a concern or problem, two positive phone calls must be made. The adoption of this policy has been the result of an evolutionary process. The telephone contacts with parents started with a few teachers. As other teachers saw the benefits, more began to participate until it became an accepted school practice. Next year the school plans to have a telephone in every classroom, or at least one for every interdisciplinary team.

One of the interdisciplinary teams at Mann Middle took on the special challenge of working with a group of 90 students who were at extreme risk of school failure. The team decided to increase the face-to-face contact with parents by devoting three Saturdays during the year to conferencing with parents. The conferences were held on the teachers' own time without compensation from the school. The project-oriented curriculum, designed by the team, coupled with extraordinary efforts to reach out to parents has resulted in considerable achievement gains for these students. The teachers have the intrinsic rewards of seeing the increasing achievements of their students; however, this level of parent contact is not likely to be maintained or replicated unless more school support, such as release time or compensation is given.

Practices that Facilitate Home/School/Community as Co-Supporters. As a result of their increased communication, all three of these schools have experienced increased interaction with parents. Muirlands has always enjoyed strong parental support from its resident White population. The development of the VEEP parent leadership team has now enabled Hispanic parents to find ways to demonstrate their support for the school. In a recent Cinco de Mayo celebration, VEEP parents organized a series of hands-on activities for students to introduce them to aspects of Hispanic-Mexican culture. This volunteer activity in many respects moved beyond traditional expressions of support into the families-as-teachers level of involvement. In addition, the activity showed that limited-English-speaking parents have important skills and knowledge to contribute to children's education.

Montgomery Junior High has developed a very strong parent volunteer corps that performs thousands of hours of volunteer service for the school working in the library, copying materials for teachers and performing other clerical tasks. Both teachers and parents, however, have been reluctant to involve volunteers in the classroom in any teaching or tutoring capacities.

The needs of the parent communities served by Muirlands, Mann and Montgomery have pushed these school to find new ways to support parents. All three have formed extensive partnerships with community agencies to provide workshops and support for parents. Muirlands and Mann, have benefited from a separate Enda McConnell Clark grant that was awarded to a coalition of seven community groups, with the June Burnett Institute for Children, Youth and Families serving as grant coordinator. This coalition, called the Home-School Partnership Project, organizes parenting classes for each of the ethnic groups, provides leadership training, and offers resources and support to each school's partnership building effort. For example, the Urban League conducted parenting classes for African-American families, the Parent Institute for Hispanic families, and the [illegible]on of Pan Asian Communities for Southeast Asian and Filipino families. At Muirlands, 6[illegible] parents completed the six-week Parent Institute class that not only taught parenting skills but also helped parents learn how to be an advocate for their child. Even larger numbers of parents have completed the classes at Mann. The Chicano Federation has been involved in leadership development and advocacy for Hispanic parents. The San Diego City PTA Council's Project HOPE (Harness Our Parent Energy) has been working with the predominantly White PTA boards to help them become more integrated and representative of the ethnic diversity found in the schools. In addition, Project HOPE encourages the boards to undertake activities that involve and meet the needs of all parents.

The Home-School Partnership Project has resulted in several benefits. First, the partners have enabled Muirlands and Mann to meet the needs of their diverse parent populations in ways that the schools would be unable to do alone. Second, the project is modelling collaboration for the school, demonstrating how representatives from diverse ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups need to work together for the benefit of children. Third, the partners themselves have grown and benefited from increased understanding from working with each other.

In addition to receiving support from the Home-School Partnership Project, Mann Middle-school has also benefited from being a part of the Crawford Community Cluster a nine-school coalition to coordinate community agency support to meet parent needs. The director of this coalition is based in a bungalow at the nearby high school. His salary is paid in part by the school district and by funds received from each participating school. The coalition has brought together an enormous array of service clubs, churches, community agencies, counseling services, food distribution programs, health services, police and welfare agencies to help families. Teachers at the schools have become involved through donating household items, food, and clothing to the resource bank to meet the needs of families in crisis. These coordinated models--the Crawford Community Coalition and the Home-School Partnership Project--represent important first steps in helping families be able to meet their basic parenting obligations, and thus increase the likelihood of their children's success in school.

Montgomery Junior High has also found a way to form a support network for parents by collaborating with local community agencies. Five agencies (South Bay Community Center, South Bay Drug Rehabilitation Center, Union of Pall Asian Communities, Amancer, and Barrio Station) have each adopted the school for a day. The school provides a room for agency staff to meet with small groups of students who have been assigned to them or fall within their jurisdiction. These counselors or social workers hold conferences with parents and students, conduct parenting classes in the afternoon or evening, and meet with parents in their homes when necessary. This collaborative effort allows the school to provide support for families beyond what the school counselors have time to do.

The school also has strong links with the police and probation departments. Vista Hill and Southwood, two hospitals specializing in substance abuse rehabilitation, work closely with school staff to provide free assessments for students and family members referred to them by the school. Montgomery's latest community partnership effort involves the San Diego Share Program, a food distribution center. For a small monthly fee, families receive subsidized food. In exchange, participating families must donate several hours of community service, which in this case means more volunteers for Montgomery since the school serves as a distribution center for the program. Such extensive support for families has meant ever-increasing positive support for the school from parents.

Programs that Encourage Home and School as Co-Learners. The collaboration with community agencies described above has been key in providing learning opportunities for parents at all three middle-schools. The primary focus of these workshops has been parenting and leadership development. In addition all three schools hold back-to-school nights which are very well attended. Mann Middle had over 700 parents attend this year. Montgomery organizes a parent/student orientation for incoming seventh graders, and each spring organizes a *Shadow Your Student Day* to give parents an opportunity to experience a day at school. A Baltimore middle-school implemented a similar sixth-grade parent/student orientation where parents followed their student's schedule for a day and learned about expectations and the school's programs (Epstein and Herrick, 1991b). All three groups--parents, teachers, and students--felt the program was worthwhile. Parents who had previously had children attend the school, reported that this daylong in-service gave them new and valuable insights into the school program.

Muirlands began the year by organizing a learning opportunity for its 10 designated VEEP parent leaders and their mentees. At the beginning-of-the-year staff development day, the twenty parents were introduced to the faculty. Teachers from the science and social studies departments presented demonstration lessons, helped parents learn how students should read and take notes from their textbooks, and described the interdisciplinary approach used in teaching history and language arts. Parents were given tips on how to help their children make note cards and study vocabulary words; however, more specific strategies needed to be shared with the parents about what they could do at home to help. The missing dimension of the day was an opportunity for parents to share important cultural information with teachers. In other words, the teachers did not see themselves as learners or the parents having vital information to share with them.

Two areas of home and school as co-learners are weak in these three schools. First, the schools made working with families a minimal focus of staff development. If schools are to build a more active partnership with families which fulfill a broad range of partnership roles, teachers need new knowledge and skills, just as parents do. Some of the knowledge, skills and strategies needed by school staff will be discussed below.

A second neglected area is workshops for parents which would enable them to play a more active teaching role at home. For example, the Muirlands workshop presented to the parent leaders at the beginning of the year to introduce them to the science and math curriculum needs to be available to all parents and needs to be offered several times during the year. Montgomery Junior High and Mann Middle have held a few Family Math, Family Computer and Family Cooking workshops but in general the schools have not offered parent and student workshops that focus on academic subjects which would enable parents to more effectively assist their children. Many elementary schools in San Diego County offer Family Math workshops (a K-8 program), and the workshops usually include or are even specifically targeted to fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade students. Schools serving middle-grade students, however, have been slow to venture into joint parent/student learning programs such as Family Math.

Parents Sharing Books (Smith, 1991), a project of Indiana University and supported by funding from the Lilly Endowment, is one potential home learning program that involves parents of middle-grade students in reading at home. The purpose of the program is to promote family literacy and parent/student interaction around books at a critical time when young adolescents' interest in reading begins to diminish. During the first phase of the project, thirty-seven Indiana middle/junior high schools sent teacher/parent teams to be trained to implement the program. These teams then trained parents at their schools in techniques and strategies for effectively sharing and discussing books with their middle-school children at home. The initial evaluation responses from parents have been very enthusiastic. Some of the benefits for parents and students were increased time together, improved communication and discussion, and higher self-esteem and confidence (Smith, 1991).

Several major problems confronted *Parents Sharing Books.* First, the program's success depended upon the commitment of the teacher/parent leadership team. Strong principal support proved essential to effective implementation. For example, adequate time and support for the leadership team to organize, conduct and follow-up after the workshops frequently depended upon administrative support. Second, recruiting parent participants was a challenge for a number of the schools. Middle-schools may be unfamiliar with recruitment strategies or the time it takes to involve parents. Third, time for parents to participate in the training or workshops and time for doing the activities with their children after the workshops was a bigger barrier than had been anticipated (Smith, 1991). One solution used by one of the *Parent Sharing Books* schools was to involve grandparents and other family members. Another school involved both parents and students in the workshop sessions which provided a built-in motivator for parents and students to do the reading activities at home after the session. Such joint parent/student learning programs can be an effective way to increase parent involvement in learning/teaching activities at home.

Programs that Encourage Home and School as Co-Teachers. None of these three schools substantially changed or restructured practices in ways that encouraged parents as co-teachers. Homework is a part of school life in all three schools. Assignment calendars are in use to help parents know what homework is assigned, but none had undertaken a systematic review of homework practices and problems. Nor had any of the schools developed home learning materials similar to the Teachers Involving Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS, Epstein 1987b) project developed under the auspices of The Johns Hopkins University by Baltimore middle-grade teachers.

A recent study by Raul Pizarro (1992) in Chile indicated that when middle-grade parents are given systematic training in how to help their children, important achievement gains can be reached. In his study, assistance was given in the area of mathematics and Spanish through twelve workshop sessions with parents. The achievement gains were more significant in mathematics than in Spanish, but students benefitted from parental assistance in both subjects. This intervention was much more systematic and substantial than is offered in most parent workshops, and indicates that if the level of home support is to be dramatically affected, much more thorough and ongoing support will be needed.

The summer home learning packets developed by the Center for Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students at Johns Hopkins (Epstein and Herrick, 1991a) represent another way in which the teaching role of parents can be reinforced. Packets of activities in English and math were prepared for all seventh and eighth graders. The packets were prepared by teachers over the summer and mailed in July and August. Not all families reported receiving the packets or receiving them in a timely manner, but many of those who did receive them, responded to them favorably. Some students and parents found the directions unclear or needed more assistance, perhaps such as was provided in the Chilean project described above. Post-tests of student achievement showed that low-achieving students (as indicated by tests taken the previous spring) who had high use of the materials showed gains. Students who were fair students and high users of the materials maintained their scores, whereas a higher percentage of fair students who were low users showed declines from the spring to fall tests. This preliminary study indicated that students and parents are willing to do learning activities over the summer, but some families will need more guidance and support if more substantial learning gains are to he achieved and more families are to be involved.

Just as the three San Diego middle-schools have not investigated or invested in more systematic home learning programs, neither have they involved parents in the classroom in teaching roles. There is some indication that parents can play a more active role in this area as well. As part of its TIPS project, parents were trained to share great art works with middle-grade students (Epstein and Dauber, 1989a). An Australian project also turned to art as a vehicle to involve parents as teachers in school (McGlip, 1992). Parents carried out lessons in the classroom in conjunction with the classroom teacher, in after-school sessions, or even in their own homes for small groups of students and parents in the evening. These two projects indicate that parents can play useful teaching roles in the classroom to support teachers' instructional program. However, more research needs to be done to explore in what other subject areas parents or community members could assist teachers and what impact such programs will have on home/school/community relations and students' learning.

Developing, Home and School as Co-Advisors, Advocates, and Decisionmakers. There are Parent/Teacher Associations (PTA) at all three schools. Muirlands has always had a strong and active PTA, with the Board of Directors composed primarily of White parents in the resident community. The Muirlands PTA board has made an effort to bridge the language, cultural, and distance barriers by occasionally attending meetings in the VEEP community. However, there is still not a sense of equality; Hispanic parent volunteers perceive themselves to be treated as second class citizens and no VEEP parents have been recruited for the PTA board. Maintaining a PTA at Mann Middle and Montgomery has been more problematic. When Montgomery initiated its efforts to reach out to its diverse parent community, the PTA was found to be a barrier because the PTA board was perceived to represent only one faction of the community. The teacher coordinating the parent/community outreach program found it easier to organize informal groupings of parents. These parents became volunteers, undertook many projects, and assisted the coordinator in contacting other parents. A new PTA board was elected in 1991-92, which brought together a diverse group of parents more reflective of the community. This reconstituted group now may be able to play a more active role at the school.

Parents at all three schools participate in school-site decisionmaking through School Site Councils (mandated if the school receives state School Improvement Funds) or School Governance Committees established as part of the school restructuring. In addition, parents serve on other advisory or ad hoc committees. These committees have important roles in planning school improvement and change. Montgomery has also taken the added step to have parents serve on all major school committees such as the dress code committee, the Student Attendance Review Board, and other ad hoc committees established to address a particular problem. The home/school partnership coordinator felt that giving parents more say in decisions that affect their children resulted in greater parent support in implementing the decisions.

The VEEP parent network at Muirlands empowered parents in ways that were unanticipated by the staff. Using the telephone network created by the school and its regional VEEP liaisons, a group of VEEP parents called other parents and invited them to meet to discuss their concerns. After several meetings, a document was prepared listing a number of issues about the treatment of their students, the perceived lack of opportunities for VEEP students to participate in extracurricular clubs and activities, the number of discipline referrals and suspensions given to VEEP students, and the placement of VEEP students in Special Education classes or in less rigorous and advanced classes than the resident students. The hardest lesson for the school staff has been accepting the collective action and demands of the parents. Traditionally the school staff dealt with parent concerns one-on-one, which usually allowed the school staff to remain in control. The collective advocacy of the parents and the strident manner in which the issues were raised shifted the balance of power and authority. The school has turned to a mediation center to assist the school staff and parents in finding solutions to the concerns and problems presented by the parents. The actions of the VEEP parents have caused the staff to do some soulsearching about what it means when parents are truly involved, especially collectively, and the school is no longer the only one defining the terms of parent involvement. If the parental concerns can be resolved in ways that preserve the dignity of both staff and parents and lead to solutions that are beneficial to students, significant new ground will have been broken and lessons will have been learned in how to build effective home/school partnerships.

Restructuring the Middle Grades: Implications for Home-School Partnerships

In many respects, schools serving middle-grade students have led the way in educational reform. The California High School Task Force Report, *Second to None* (1992), presents some recommendations that will be familiar to those involved in middle-school reform, such as smaller, more personal learning units, re-engaging with families and communities, and interdisciplinary approaches to a core curriculum through grade ten. Although changes in the middle grades, especially the conversion of junior high schools to middle-schools continues apace, additional reforms are being explored. These include:

1. Continued development of more integrated, meaning-centered curricula.
2. Use of portfolio and performance-based assessments that will more accurately reflect depth of knowledge and understanding and the diversity and multiplicity of intelligences.
3. Establishment of community-based learning and services.
4. Initiation of interdisciplinary teams and advisory periods.
5. Establishment of site-based management.

Each of these approaches for reforming and restructuring middle-grade education offers opportunities for strengthening home/school partnerships. This section of the paper proposes a few strategies schools could pursue which currently are not widely found in schools serving middle-grade students. In general the strategies call for more active engagement of teachers with families.

Development of integrated meaning-centered curricula. New insights into the process of learning and teaching and instruction are leading to calls for a curricula that begins with and builds on what students already know (Marshall 1992). The recent research asserts that learning must take place in a meaningful, integrated context, not as decontextualized discrete facts. Knowledge is collaboratively constructed in a group and class context, not given as a fixed body of information to be acquired and assimilated by a passive student. Important learning can occur in collaborative groups with multiple opportunities for processing information in a variety of contexts and environments (Marshall, 1992).

The implications for home/school/community partnerships from these findings are considerable. First, if teachers begin with what students already know, the family is immediately brought into the learning environment. Much of what students know will derive from family and community experiences as well as previous school experiences. By valuing what students, already know, the family as a learning environment, regardless of educational or economic level of the family, can be reinforced.

The following incident provides a concrete example of how the family can be integrated into a meaning-centered curriculum. In an integrated language arts/social studies class, the students were reading *Return from Manzanar.* In collaborative groups, the students analyzed various family values, customs, traditions, and practices that influenced the protagonists in the story. Then the teacher had the students individually write a short paper on their own family values, customs and traditions. This activity provided an excellent way of linking the curriculum to students' lives. However, the teacher missed an opportunity to involve the family and community in the learning process. In their collaborative groups, the students could have developed a series of questions to ask their parents or other family members about family values, customs and traditions. After conducting their interviews, the students could have written their papers, then compared their interview results with others in the class. A class summary illustrating similarities and differences in family customs and traditions would have provided fascinating learning experience in this ethnically diverse classroom. Based on the interview results, some parents could have been invited to share particular customs or traditions. Just as teachers are learning new instructional strategies to create a more meaning-centered curriculum, so too do they need to learn ways of linking that curriculum to family and community. The new middle-grades TIPS (Teachers Involve Parents and Students) project at Johns Hopkins University represents one excellent way that middle-grade teachers have collaborated to develop home learning materials that involve parents and students in joint learning activities. This model needs to be replicated by teachers in a variety of settings.

Portfolio and performance-based assessment. As with a more meaning-centered curricula, portfolio and performance-based assessments offer schools new opportunities for family and community partnerships. Portfolios generally involve students in selecting some of their best work for inclusion in the portfolio. Family members could be involved in the process in two ways. First, after selecting their work, students could take the portfolio home to explain their selection criteria and process to their family. In this way, family members would have an opportunity to see the growth and progress of their child and to share in their successes as opposed to just seeing a much less meaningful grade of A, B, or C on a report card or progress report. Second, family members could be involved in reviewing all of the student's work and helping to make the selection of work for inclusion in the portfolio. Again parents would have an excellent opportunity to see the growth, development, and progress of their child. In addition, parental insights can be included in the evaluative process.

A second type of portfolio assessment is that recommended by Gardner (ASCD tape). Rather than a collection of the best work, a process folio contains all of the steps taken to complete a paper or project. It resembles a portfolio or notebook of an artist, designer, writer, scientist, or engineer that contains all of the rough drafts or sketches, designs or experiments that led to the final product. Such a folio, shared with parents, would help the family to see learning as a process. If schools are to move from a focus on factual learning to a greater emphasis on depth of understanding, such process folios will be essential in educating the family and community, which has come to expect much simpler measures of student achievement. Process folios will give parents and community a window on children's learning processes that has never been possible with traditional report cards or displays of students' best work.

Performance-based assessment and project work also give families and community members an opportunity to see what students have mastered in academic areas. Such performances and displays have previously been reserved for knowledge and skills mastered in the extra/curricular arenas such as theatre, concerts, arts or sports. A teacher in a Colorado school demonstrated how performance assessment could be applied to an academic area when she organized a geometry fair and invited parents and community to view their children's mastery of geometry concepts displayed in an enormous array of projects (Standards Not Standardization Video). Some students who previously had not done well in the paper-and-pencil tests of geometry facts, proved to be master builders and able to apply their knowledge.

Another way in which community can be involved as schools restructure to use performance-based assessments is to have a parent/community advisory panel for each academic area. The panel would work with the teachers to design appropriate performance-assessment measures which relate school skills to the world of work. Such involvement with local businesses would greatly strengthen school/community/business collaboration around an important task--assessing students' knowledge. Teachers would learn firsthand the kinds of skills and knowledge needed by future workers, and businesses would gain a more accurate picture of what students are learning. Such collaborative assessment efforts would create opportunities for dialogue and problem solving and could help to identify community learning resources for students.

Interdisciplinary teams and advisory periods. To ease the transition from elementary self-contained classrooms, schools serving middle-grade students have turned to interdisciplinary teams and advisory classes. Both of these restructuring strategies offer unique opportunities to connect with families, but in many cases they are not being used. For example, the advisory teacher is usually assigned a smaller class than may be typical for a regular academic class, and the advisor has only one class of advisees. Thus, the advisory teacher is in a unique position to be not only these students' advisor but also to be the primary person to establish contact with the home. This would mitigate against the common complaint of teachers in secondary schools that they cannot stay in close touch with parents because they have too many students. Since an advisor may have only twenty to twenty-five students, the advisor could conduct twice a year parent/teacher/student conferences as is done in elementary schools. The parents would have a point of contact that is less intimidating than trying to contact all of their child's teachers. The student would know he or she has an advocate to turn to for help.

The interdisciplinary team offers another vehicle for staying in closer touch with families. Research indicates that many parents want to help their children, but often feel unable to assist. To provide more information to parents, interdisciplinary teams could organize quarterly curriculum nights to review the next nine weeks' curriculum and offer tips on how parents could help their child at home. In addition, once the learning themes are identified, parents could be surveyed to find out if they had skills or information to share with the teacher and class. Such an approach would be more valuable for parents than the typical 15-minute rotation through the class schedule at back-to-school night. If students are involved in these curriculum nights to share their work, parents are more likely to attend.

Site-based management. Another major restructuring theme is increased decisionmaking at the school site by teachers and, in many site-based management plans, by parents and students as well at the middle-grade level. Site-based teams offer opportunities for decisionmaking and advocacy beyond the traditional Parent/Teacher Association or parent club support roles. New roles and responsibilities have to be learned if effective site-based management teams are to be created. Often too little attention is paid to the training needs of the new team. If a school staff has had little previous experience in working together, teachers may feel reluctant and uncomfortable involving parents, students and community members in new decision-making structures. Since parent and staff representation on the site-based management team is usually quite limited, it is important to set up a subcommittee structure that allows for participation of greater numbers of parents and teachers. These subcommittees can be ad hoc in nature, such as a dress code committee, or can be ongoing such as the departmental advisory panels suggested above in the section on portfolios and performance-based assessments.

Schools serving diverse ethnic populations need to be careful that all groups feel comfortable and welcome to participate. Leadership development may be necessary as was done by Muirlands and Mann Middle Schools. With careful planning and opportunities for training, service on a school site-based management team could become a valuable tool for developing the community leadership that is needed in many inner city neighborhoods.

Staff Development

Establishing new working relations with parents will not be an easy task. This is especially true because teacher pre-service and in-service training traditionally provide few opportunities for teachers to develop needed skills (Chavkin and Williams, 1988). Chavkin and Williams stress that teachers need knowledge about research on parent involvement and successful parent involvement models. In addition, teachers need specific skills which will enable them to work with families. To better develop the knowledge and skills that teachers need, some changes must be made in preservice teacher education programs. The states of Washington and California have recently passed legislation and a legislative resolution, respectively, which call for parent involvement to be made a component of teacher education. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) (cited in Liontos, 1992) also recommends that family involvement information be a mandatory part of teacher training course work, not an optional interest area.

A recent survey of University of California pre-service teacher education programs showed that schools of education are gradually increasing the amount of time and attention paid to this issue (Ammon, 1992). In some courses, student teachers were learning how to identify community resources and gaining an understanding and appreciation of different school neighborhoods (Ammon, et al. , 1992b). In other courses, student teachers developed curriculum materials which reflected the diverse backgrounds of students and served to link home and school through home learning activities (Ammon, et al. , 1992). The University of Houston-Clear Lake in Texas, has also added a course to their pre-service program which helps teachers to identify barriers to family involvement and provides practice in overcoming those barriers (Liontos, 1992). These represent small, but very important, changes in pre-service education and should help new teachers to more easily form productive working relations with families.

To strengthen home/school relations in most middle-schools, however, will require school- and/or district-based staff development. School districts are beginning to recognize the need for staff development to ensure successful implementation of newly adopted parent involvement initiatives. For example, the Parent Involvement Policy Adopted by the San Diego City Schools stresses that building the capacities of teachers, administrators, and other staff members to work effectively with families is prerequisite for family/school partnerships (Chrispeels, 1991). The staff development, however, cannot be a one-shot workshop. Studies have shown that schools, which have implemented school improvement programs which most successfully enhance student learning, engaged in systematic and ongoing staff development (Chrispeels, 1992). Similarly, unless the staff development addressing home/school partnership issues is of sufficient depth and duration, it is unlikely that significant changes will occur. The type of staff development will vary from school to school depending upon the current level of interaction with families and the community, and the needs and experiences of the school staff. The conceptual framework presented above can be used by schools to begin an assessment of areas of strength and areas needing improvement.

One area that may need attention is working with families from diverse backgrounds. Many schools have experienced rapidly changing demographics. Family structures and the number of families living at poverty levels have increased considerably in the last few years. These changes mean that teachers need new knowledge about the families and communities with whom they work.

Unfortunately, as Liontos (1992) points out, there are few materials available to guide teachers in working with families, especially at-risk families. In addition, the current structure of the school day and year does not offer teachers much time for home visits or opportunities to become acquainted with families. Such first-hand contact is one of the best ways for gaining an understanding and appreciation of families. An occasional multicultural fair, while helping to build a sense of community, is no substitute for systematic staff development about the ethnic background language and culture of the students and their families. Davies found that an action research project of teachers in Portugal which brought the teachers out of the school and into the community to study, observe, and better understand the culture of working-class children greatly facilitated teacher learning and generated new appreciation for the lives and language of the children (cited in Liontos, 1992).

The staff development needs to be at least two-fold: general information about the culture and community of students which expands knowledge and diminishes stereotyping; and information on how teachers can integrate family knowledge culture, and traditions into the everyday life of the classroom and curriculum. Learning about diverse cultures will also provide an opportunity to enhance communication skills. One aspect of middle-school reform is to implement teacher advisory programs. These programs have often faltered because of inadequate staff development. Successful advisor/advisee programs depend on good communication skills and a facilitative teaching style (Myrick and Myrick, 1990; Wittmer and Myrick, 1989). These same skills are needed for enhancing communication with parents. Training in communication and conferencing skills would enable advisory teachers to become the point of contact between home and school. If each advisor scheduled twice-yearly conferences with their advisees and their families, communications and parent involvement at the middle-grade level would be greatly enhanced. Thus, if middle-schools focused on strengthening their advisory periods, they are also likely to find that home/school communication is also strengthened.

Another area for potential staff development is in designing quality homework and home-learning activities. The development of such materials lend themselves to an action research approach which Sagor (1991) has found useful in building faculty efficacy and enthusiasm. For example, interdisciplinary teams could develop and test different types of homework or homelearning activities to see which approach engages students and their families most effectively and which leads to desired outcomes. Teacher exploration, experimentation, and sharing of results is a powerful staff development model (Davies, 1991).

Areas for Further Research in Developing Middle Grade Home School Partnerships

While there is a fairly significant body of research and studies regarding parent involvement at the elementary level, especially in the pre-primary and primary grades, little work has been done to research parent involvement at the middle-grade level. Each of the roles presented above suggest areas for further research. For example, more work needs to be done in understanding how best to communicate with the parents of middle-grade students. What do parents most need to know about the school and to share with teachers? What methods of communication best meet parents needs? Could video and telephone message systems be effective tools of communication? How can communications be made more two-way and less unidirectional from school to the home? A recent large survey of parents in an elementary school district revealed that although parents felt teachers were communicating with them, they expressed a strong need for more communication, especially face-to-face communication (Chrispeels and Daugherty, 1992). Do middle-grade parents feel the same way?

In the area of co-supporters, additional questions present themselves. As middle-schools move to establish houses or villages or other types of smaller configurations for grouping students, are these smaller units being used to build parent support and create a sense of community? What strategies work best? Given the significant social, emotional, health and welfare needs of many students, how can middle-schools build partnerships with community agencies to better meet student and family needs? How extensive do the partnerships and interagency collaboration need to be, and how can resources be best utilized with out overburdening already overworked school and agency staff?

The third area needing research is that of co-learners and co-teachers. These two areas are closely interrelated. As parents and school staff enhance their own learning, the capacity to teach also is likely to increase. What do parents and school staff need to know if they are to work more effectively together to support student school success? Some of the areas for possible teacher staff development were outlined above. However, little research has actually been done to show which types of staff development and what content is most helpful to teachers in strengthening their working relations with students and their families.

In determining their learning needs, parents need to be active partners with school staff in deciding which topics would be most helpful to them. The format and frequency of workshops also need to be investigated. Are workshops in which family members and students are learning together more effective than if parents attend alone? Can parents play a more active teaching role, if more curriculum-oriented workshops are held? Can curriculum-learning opportunities such as Family Math, Family Science, or Parents Sharing Books, strengthen family communications and interaction as well as workshops which focus just on parent/child communications? When families attend such workshops do teachers form more positive opinions about parents and their ability to help their child? The National School Survey cited above indicated that parents felt able to help their children with homework, although they also indicated they would like to have more guidance from teachers in how to help. Teachers, on the other hand, overwhelmingly felt that the largely Hispanic parent population of this district was unable to help. Do teachers hold similar views in regard to parents of middle-grade students? Do these attitudes vary depending upon the ethnic and economic makeup of the community? If views and perceptions do vary, do teachers give less homework and expect less assistance from parents based on their presumptions of parent ability to help?

If greater parental support is desired with homework and home learning activities, there are a number of areas that would profit from further research. Cooper (1989) has conducted a thorough review of the research on homework, and some useful information is known that needs to be used by teachers to guide them in developing appropriate homework. However, most of the research examines traditional types of homework, such as math problems to solve. If teachers move toward a more meaning-centered curriculum and a project-and problem-solving approach to learning, what kinds of homework assignments are appropriate and have the greatest impact on student learning? How can homework and home learning assignments be designed so they will not penalize students whose home learning environments have fewer resources than students from middle-or upper-middle class families? How can parents and students be meaningfully and actively involved in evaluating student work and how does such involvement affect student and parent learning?

In relation to the typology of home/school partnership roles presented above, one last area for further research is in the area of co-decisionmakers. advocates and advisors. A central issue for further research is: how can parents, students and school staff work more effectively together on school decision-making bodies? What skills are needed and how can these be quickly acquired, when there is often rapid turnover in committee membership? These are just a few of the many areas that can be identified as possible areas for further research. Existing research can help to guide parents and school staff as they work together to form stronger partnerships. It is important as schools work to build partnerships that data be collected and analyzed and action research projects used as a way to form the most viable partnerships in schools serving middle-grade students and their families.

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Evaluating Education Reform:
Parent and Community Involvement in the Middle Grades

SCHOOL AND FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS
IN THE MIDDLE GRADES

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School and Family Partnerships in the Middle Grades

Introduction

Early adolescence has been called the time in a child's life when parents are the most difficult! In early adolescence -- the years between 10-14 -- youngsters experience simultaneous social, emotional, intellectual, and physical changes and challenges. Most early adolescents and their families successfully negotiate this period of development and move on to new challenges in late adolescence, high school, and young adulthood (Offer, et al., 1988). Some youngsters, however, have serious problems that appear or increase in the middle-grades, creating turmoil during these pivotal years, and preventing some students from measuring up to their full potential. As students enter adolescence, many parents begin to lose touch with their children's schools and, therefore, with their children as *students*. Middle-grades schools need to think about how to connect and communicate with families in order to maximize support for student learning and development.

What must be done to develop and maintain family and school connections when students become early adolescents? ...when middle-grades schools become more complex? ...and when families become more confused about how their children are developing and about their continuing influence on their children's education? We address these questions with a brief overview of middle-grades students, families, and schools; a theory and framework to help build successful partnerships; a summary of research on partnerships at this level; and a discussion of issues for educators and researchers to consider as they work to improve practice and increase knowledge about school and family partnerships in the middle-grades.

The Concept of "Partnership"

What do we mean by "parent involvement" in the middle-grades? We suggest that the term "school and family partnerships" better expresses the shared interests, responsibilities, investments, and overlapping influences of families and schools in children's education through adolescence. There are several reasons for this. The broader term emphasizes that the two institutions share major responsibilities for children's education and that both are needed to support children as "students." In addition to recognizing the school as equals in partnership, the broader term recognizes the importance and potential influence of all family members, not only parents, and all family structures, not only those that include natural parents. Moreover, the term allows students to join the partnership as communicators with and for their schools and families. The term makes room, too, for community groups, individuals, agencies, and organizations to work with schools and families and to invest in the education of children whose futures affect the quality of life of the community.

When some say "parent involvement" they mean things that some parents do on their own by their own invention. The "know-how" may be social-class-based or experience-based, relying on parents' skills to locate information they want and need. Other terms are sometimes used to describe the connections of families and schools. The term "home/school relations" sounds informal and conversational, rather than planned and comprehensive. By contrast, "partnership" expresses a formal alliance and contractual agreement to work actively toward shared goals and to share the profits or benefits of mutual investments.

School and family partnerships recognize that leadership is needed from schools to help all families obtain useful information that is not available from other sources. In the middle-grades, school-generated information may be the only equitable way to enable all families to become more knowledgeable about their early adolescents and their schools. Partnerships also recognize that in order to design more effective and responsive practices, schools need to obtain information from families about their children, their goals, and the connections they want with their middle-grade schools.

Much like partners in business, partners in education must work hard to clarify their mutual interests in the children they share. All of the parties in a partnership must work to develop trust, organize their responsibilities, and appreciate each others' investments and contributions. Strong partnerships develop over time, as partners exchange information and work together to assess their strengths and needs, set goals, plan projects, implement practices, evaluate results, celebrate successes, and revise activities to assist their children to succeed in school. These interactions should result in better school, family, and community programs and practices.

There are no shortcuts to the process of developing partnerships and improving programs. Experience shows that three to five years are needed to build strong partnerships in schools with all families, and even more time is needed to assure a lasting structure of successful practices to involve families (Comer, 1980; Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

Although one should not get sidetracked by semantics, the words we choose are important if they influence the understanding of responsibilities and the design and conduct of interactions. The terms "parent involvement" and "home-school relations" should be considered shorthand for the broader, more inclusive concept of school, family, and community partnerships.

Theoretical Model -- Overlapping Spheres of Influence

Overlapping spheres of influence. The term "partnership" is represented in a theoretical model of "overlapping spheres of influence" (Epstein, 1987a). The spheres of influence on children's learning and development include the family and the school, or, in full form, four spheres of influence of the family, school, community, and peer group (Epstein, 1988a). The spheres can, by design, be pushed together to overlap to create an area for partnership activities or pushed apart to separate the family and school based on forces that operate in each environment. The external model of the spheres of influence shows that the extent of overlap is affected by the forces of (a) time -- to account for changes in the ages and grade levels of students and the influence of historic changes, and (b) behavior -- to account for the backgrounds, philosophies, and practices in each environment. The external model recognizes pictorially that there are some practices that schools and families (and the other spheres) conduct separately and others jointly, and that those that overlap are potentially important influences on students.

The internal model of the spheres of influence recognizes the complex and essential interpersonal relations and influence patterns that occur between and among individuals at home and at school (and also, more fully, in the community and peer groups) in practices that concern students' education and development. There are two levels of interpersonal relations -- one at the *institutional level* of schools and families, as when schools invite all families to events or send the same communications to all families, and the other at the *individual level*, as when a parent, teacher, and student meet in conference to discuss an individual student's progress or problem, or when a teacher telephones or writes to a parent for an individual communication. These levels of interpersonal relations also can intersect as when teachers give the whole class interactive homework assignments but only some students conduct the exchanges with a parent.

The central role of the student. Students are at the center of the model of overlapping spheres of influence for school and family partnerships. The model assumes that student learning, development, and success, broadly defined, are the main reasons for home and school partnerships. Productive connections of schools and families, and pertinent individual interactions of parents, teachers, and students are conducted in order to help students increase their academic skills, self-esteem, positive attitudes toward learning, independence, other achievements, accomplishments, and other desired behaviors that are characteristic of successful students.

Students are not passive in their educational growth and change, but are the main actors in their own success in school. School and family partnerships do not "produce" successful students. Rather, the partnership activities that include teachers, parents, and students engage and guide students so that *they* produce their own success.

As they mature, children face many competing demands and options for their time in school and out. Most middle-grades students choose to invest their time, energy, and identity in those activities that motivate and reward them, increase their self-esteem, increase their social status among peers, and provide challenges and opportunities for success. When schools and families work in partnership, students hear that school is important from parents and teachers, and see that influential people in both environments are investing time and resources to work together to help them become successful students. The students' own work is legitimized by this process of mutual support.

The central role of the student in school and family partnerships occurs across the grades but is especially important beginning in the middle-grades when students become even more instrumental in helping to conduct and interpret school communications with their families. Also, with the more complex curriculum in the middle-grades, students must work harder to convert support from their schools and families into individual achievements. Programs of school and family connections in the middle-grades will fail unless the early adolescents understand, accept, and participate in the partnerships designed to assist them to be more successful in school.

The full model of overlapping spheres of influence recognizes the interlocking histories of institutions that motivate, socialize, and educate children and the changing interactions and accumulating skills of the educators, family members, and students. These are the bases for implementing and for studying connections that benefit students, families, and schools in the middle-grades.

Middle-Grades Schools, Students, and Families

The model of overlapping spheres of influence highlights the importance of time as one of the forces that influence partnership practices. That is, the extent of overlap and the practices of partnership change from year to year, as students move from one teacher to the next who use different practices to inform and involve families, and from one level of schooling to the next, such as from the elementary to the middle-grades, or from middle-grades to high school. The different levels of schooling have different histories of partnerships with families. For example, preschool and elementary schools have been working at developing partnerships longer and more seriously than middle-grades schools up to now. In other words, school and family partnerships are developmental, accounting for and responsive to the changes that occur in the characteristics of the middle-grades students, families, and schools.

The children are changing. In early adolescence -- the years between 10-14 -- youngsters experience simultaneous social, emotional, physical, and intellectual changes and challenges. The rate of student development varies widely, across and within grades, making it difficult to identify an "average" early adolescent. Early adolescents need opportunities to develop their independence and to take more responsibility for themselves, even as they continue to need adults to guide and support them. They deepen their relationships with peers as they seek the comfort of conformity in their age group, but at the same time, they increase their self-confidence as they identify their unique talents and skills. Even as peers become more important influences for each other, adults -- parents, teachers, coaches, mentors, and others --continue to be important influences. They need to be available and supportive as knowledgeable partners about education.

Middle-grades students are often the main source of information for parents about their schools. Because of their increasing maturity and new relationships with their families and teachers, students play important roles -- more powerful than in the earlier grades -- in three-way partnerships.

School and family partnerships need to help parents understand early adolescent development, peer relations, and middle-grades schools, and help children understand that their school recognizes the continuing importance and influence of their families in their lives.

The families are changing. Compared to parents of elementary school children, the parents of middle-grades youngsters are, themselves, older. They may live further from the middle-grades school; be busy with younger children in the elementary grades; or working full-time and balancing their careers with family responsibilities.

Parents of early adolescents often wonder what happened to the young child they thought they knew. They may be confused about their early adolescents' development and worried about the problems that teens face today. Parents may be unsure of how they can foster student independence and still take a role in guiding their youngsters in important behaviors and decisions about school and about other aspects of life.

School and family partnerships in the middle-grades need to be designed and implemented so that they fit the needs and realities of family life, working parents, varied family structures, and other factors that affect families. The connections need to help families understand their sons and daughters who also are middle-grades students.

The schools are changing. Middle-grades schools are differently organized and staffed from most elementary schools. They are usually larger, fully departmentalized, with more teachers certified for the secondary grades, educated as subject-matter experts, and unprepared to work with families. The schools vary in grade span, staffing, middle-grades practices such as interdisciplinary teams or advisory programs, and other aspects of instruction. They offer students more complex and demanding subjects than in the younger grades. The content of the curriculum -- expanded from the time that parents went to school -- becomes more difficult for parents to understand, keep track of, or talk about easily with their children. Counselors and other school administrators work with students on attendance, behavior, health, course choices, academic program and track placements, career planning, college preparation, and other issues that also concern families. Often, however, the families are not informed about these topics nor about how to reinforce or extend the school programs to benefit their children.

School and family partnerships need to be organized to make the best use of the various adults who have important roles in middle-grades schools, assist teachers to understand their students' families and how to mobilize family support to assist student learning, and alert families to the programs and practices that are new in the middle-grades.

Summary of Research on Effective Partnerships in the Middle Grades

A major message of many early and some continuing studies of family environments and influence is simply that *families are important* for children's learning, development, and school success across the grades, including the middle-grades. This line of research suggests that students at all grade levels do better in their academic work as well as have more positive school attitudes, higher aspirations, and other positive behaviors, if they happen to have parents who are aware, knowledgeable, encouraging, and involved. The influence on students is stronger if family support is continuous and consistent.

Most studies do not differentiate between schools and teachers that use practices to help all families participate in their children's education, and those that leave parents on their own to become involved. Without a formal program to provide information, parents are left to draw from their own resources and information, but some families have access to more resources than others. More recent research examines the impact on families, students, and teaching practice of specific school and classroom practices to inform and involve all families equally. The main question in these studies is: *If* family support is important for students, *how* can all schools maximize the number of families who are informed and involved in their children's education across the grades? (For full reviews and references of research on school and family connections at all levels see Epstein, 1992; and at the middle level see Rutherford, Billig, & Kettering, 1993).

Overview of selected results from research on partnerships at the middle level. Research is accumulating that shows that middle-grades schools can take leadership in developing and implementing practices of partnership that enable more parents to become and remain involved in their children's education. Here we highlight a few of the general results from studies of middle-grades families and teacher practices of involvement. The broad conclusions are synthesized from more than one study from the research of Bauch, 1988; Benson, 1991; Dauber & Epstein, in press; Dolan & Caroselli, 1982; Dombusch & Ritter, 1988; Epstein, 1986; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein & Herrick, 1991a, b; Epstein & Lee, 1992; Johns & Panofsky, 1987; Leitch & Tangri, 1988; Marockie & Jones, 1987; NCES, 1992; Stevenson & Baker, 1987; Useem, 1991, 1992; and Youniss & Smollar, 1989. Although a few of these studies focus on middle or high school organizations, they include samples of parents or students from the middle-grades (grades 5-9) in useful ways.

From these references we draw several conclusions that support the systematic development by middle-grades schools of comprehensive and equitable programs to inform and involve all families in the education of their early adolescents:

- Schools' practices of partnership with families decline with each grade level and decrease dramatically at the point of transition to the middle-grades. Coincidentally, with each year in school, more families report that they are unable to understand the schools or assist their children. This pattern changes when middle schools add practices to inform and involve families.

- Most parents do not participate at the school building as volunteers or in decisionmaking or leadership roles. Many do not have the time, working full- or part-time during the school day. Many do not want to; others do not know that they are welcome. In many middle-grades schools, there are no procedures for recruiting, training, and scheduling volunteers or for including parents on committees or decisionmaking teams. Many middle-grades schools have no parent organization to develop leadership or to promote family participation.

- By contrast, most parents, including up to 90% in the middle-grades, want to know how to help their own children at home in order to help their children succeed at school. Studies confirm that families need and want more information and guidance from the schools to monitor and support the education of their early adolescents. Presently, only some families -- indeed, relatively few -- have information about the schools, courses, choices, grading procedures, and many other topics that change at the middle level. Research on the implementation and effects of practices for the middle level show that parents of early adolescents, including those in inner city schools, want to assist and interact with their children about school subjects, schoolwork, and homework in helpful ways. They want to do so during the school year and during the summer, but they are given little guidance by the schools.

- Families of middle-grades students have many questions about the schools that go unanswered. They also have many suggestions to offer about improving school programs, events, and partnerships that go unheard by the school. Few schools have two-way communications processes and practices that allow an easy flow of information to and from schools and families.

- Families have high hopes for their middle-grades children, with large percentages expecting their children to attend and complete college. Many lack information that would help translate their values and goals into behaviors to guide their children toward college or other post secondary education.

- Even as peers become increasingly important in early adolescence, families remain important to students.

- Social, academic, and personal problems of students that begin to increase in early adolescence require attention from all who share interest and investments in children. The efforts of schools, families, and communities to prevent problems from occurring or to treat problems that occur have not been well-organized to date. Each institution usually works separately with children, often without knowledge of or communication with the other. The disorganized delivery of services to teens and families has contributed to the unacceptable statistics on school failure, retentions in grade, drug and alcohol abuse, delinquency, teen pregnancy, and other problems that prevent students from reaching

> their potential. Services must be more successfully integrated in new programs of school, community and family partnerships.

Overall, evidence is accumulating from local, regional, and national studies that indicates that when middle-grades schools take steps to involve all families, more parents appreciate the assistance, become successful partners, and more students benefit in achievements, attitudes, and behaviors.

Framework and Application of Six Types of Involvement

In applying the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, we ask: *What practices fall within the area of overlap as shared responsibilities of schools and families?* and *How can schools think about, organize, and implement practices to create a comprehensive program of partnership with families and with the community?*

Results from many studies lead to the formulation of a framework of six major types of involvement that describes a comprehensive program of school and family partnerships in the middle-grades (Epstein, 1987b, 1992). Many practices can be selected by schools to operationalize each type of involvement (Brandt, 1989; Epstein, 1987b, 1991; Davies, Burch & Johnson, 1992). The practices must be "tailored" in the middle-grades to respond to the changing characteristics and needs of students, school organizational and families discussed above (Epstein & Connors, 1992). Each type of involvement in the framework includes practices that are likely to lead to different outcomes or results for students, for parents, for teaching practice, and for school climate. The connection of each type of involvement with particular practices and specific outcomes corrects the simplistic assumption that any involvement of parents will quickly or dramatically increase student achievement. Studies are beginning to show that different important outcomes for students, parents, and for teaching practice will result from the varied types of involvement.

School and Family Partnerships

In this section we outline the six major types of involvement and give a few examples of practices that continue across the grades and other practices that may be particularly important for accommodating the characteristics and needs of early adolescents, their families, and their schools. We note some of the challenges of implementation and the kinds of results (or outcomes) that have been found or that can be expected from each type of involvement in the middle-grades.

Type 1 **Basic obligations of families** refer to schools providing information that families need about adolescent's health and safety, supervision, nutrition, discipline and guidance, and other parenting skills and child-rearing approaches. Middle-grades schools also need to provide families with information about building positive home conditions that support learning at each grade level. Some schools help parents with their basic obligations through workshops at the school or in other locations, and in other forms of parent education, training, and information sharing.

Families continue to teach their early adolescents many attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, customs, and skills that are unique to and valued by the family, apart from the school curriculum. Schools are enriched by understanding the backgrounds and cultures of the families of their students. This two-way exchange -- information to help families understand child and adolescent development and information to help schools understand family life and students' needs, interests, and talents -- is at the heart of Type 1 activities.

In the middle-grades, Type 1 practices may help families understand early and later adolescence, support early adolescent health and mental health, and prevent key problems in adolescent development. Families may want information (and may want to give the school information) on how to meet early adolescents' simultaneous needs for increased independence and continued guidance from families; on understanding the importance of peers and the risks of peer pressure; and on other topics. Families may want more information about setting appropriate family rules, providing decisionmaking opportunities to early adolescents, and changing discipline practices to support student development. With good information from and to their child's middle-grades school, families can continue to promote home conditions to help students balance their studying, homework, part-time jobs, and home chores.

Other Type 1 practices that have been implemented by middle-grades schools include courses for parents in adult education, GED, and English language; home visits; parent rooms for workshops for parents on difficult topics to discuss at home such as teen sexuality and drug abuse; workshops for parents and teens to attend together; and sessions for parents to talk with each other about child development and parenting.

Challenges. One challenge of successful Type 1 activities is to get information to all families who want it and who need it, and not just to the few who can attend workshops at the school. This may be done with videos, tape recordings, summaries, newsletters. cable broadcasts, and other ways. Another challenge is to arrange and maintain the channels for two-way communication that allow important information from families to come to the schools.

Outcomes. These activities should help reach goals and produce results to increase families' understanding of their early adolescents, students' awareness of the continuing role that parents play in their education, and educators' understanding of their students' families.

Type 2 **Basic obligations of schools** refer to communications from schools to families about school programs and students' progress. This includes notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters, report cards, conferences, open-house nights or other visiting opportunities, and other more innovative communications. This also includes information to help families to choose or change schools, if such policies are used in a district. Middle-grades schools vary the forms, frequency, and content of communications and greatly affect whether and how families receive information and whether the information sent home can be understood by all families.

In the middle-grades, Type 2 communications also help families help students select curricula, courses, special programs, and other activities each year.

Families need information at important transition points from elementary to middle-grades and from middle to high school. Useful orientations at these times recognize that families make transitions with their children, and that if they are informed, can help students adjust to their new schools.

At entry to the middle-grades, some structures and procedures change that families need to know about. For example, report cards often change in form and in content. Information explaining report card grading systems and interim reports should help families monitor how their adolescents are doing in school and how to help students improve their grades from one marking period to the next. Conferences may be reconfigured in the middle-grades as *parent/student/teacher conferences* to assure that students understand the connection between their teachers' and parents' communications and their own control over their motivation and learning. Conferences in the middle-grades also must allow connections of families with many teachers of different subjects or with teams of teachers if the school organizes its work in these ways.

Other topics that begin to be important to middle-grades families include how they can help students plan for college and work; begin financial savings for education and training; learn of scholarships, loans, and grants; and plan for the tests students need to take to step toward their futures.

Other Type 2 practices that have been implemented by middle-grades schools include giving families advance notice about special schedules, costs, and other requirements; conferences at home with parents who have no transportation to get to the school, or providing transportation by school bus or parent-taxi-carpools so that they can come; providing native-language translations of written or verbal communications; using local cable TV for a homework hotline, and other communications. To improve contacts, some schools have organized class parents, block parents, telephone trees, or the equivalent of a "welcome wagon" for education to provide a contact person and information to families who transfer to a middle-grades school any time during the school year. (For other examples see Chrispeels, Bourta & Daugherty, 1988).

Challenges. One challenge of successful Type 2 activities is to make communications clear and understandable for all families, including parents who have less formal education, so that all can respond to the information they receive. Other challenges are to know which families are and are not receiving the communications in order to include those who are harder to reach in each school; to extend two-way channels so that families can initiate and respond to communications; and to help middle-grades students become good partners by delivering communications home and discussing schoolwork and school decisions with their families.

Outcomes. These activities should help reach goals and produce results to increase families' and teachers' interactions; increase families' understanding and use of their school and classrooms programs and their children's progress; increase families' attendance at meetings, conferences, and events; and improve students' decisions about their schoolwork and courses with input from home. With targeted communications via tape recordings, video cassettes, summaries, newsletters, telephone answering machines or computerized messages, and other print and nonprint forms to middle-grades families, student attendance, lateness, behavior, and other outcomes may improve.

Type 3 **Involvement at school** refers to parent and other volunteers at the middle-grades school or in classrooms, and to families who come to school to support student performances, sports, or other events. In addition to Type 2 communications that inform families about opportunities and events, schools increase the number of families and community members who come to the school building by varying schedules so that more are able to participate as volunteers and as audiences at different times of the day and evening, weekends, summer, or holidays.

In the middle-grades, volunteers can be put to better use if there is a coordinator who matches volunteers' times and skills with the needs of teachers, administrators, and students. Programs that tap parents' and community members' talents, occupations, and interests can enrich students' subject classes and improve career explorations. Mentoring, coaching, and tutoring activities may be particularly helpful as students' skills, interests, and talents become increasingly diverse in the middle-grades. Some parents may want to volunteer to work with other parents of middle-grades students, perform language translations, monitor attendance, and other activities.

Other Type 3 practices that middle-grades schools have implemented include volunteers working in a parent room or parent center; volunteers making cassette tapes for students to read along when their science or social studies books are at a reading level that is beyond their current reading skills; and curriculum-linked volunteers who integrate art activities into social studies classes. (See for example, Epstein & Salinas, TIPS Volunteers in Social Studies and Art, 1991.)

Challenges. One challenge of successful Type 3 activities is to recruit volunteers widely, make hours flexible for parents and other volunteers who work during the school day, and to enable volunteers to contribute productively to the school and to the curriculum. Volunteers are more likely to be productive if their tasks are clear and their training is focused. As one veteran of a volunteer program said of how to increase productive volunteers, "Ask people to do something specific and keep asking!" When volunteers are organized to productively contribute to the middle-grades program (as when parents enrich or extend a curricular goal), teachers of different subjects are more likely to think about how to include volunteers in their work.

Another challenge of Type 3 involvement is to change the definition of "volunteer" to mean any one, any time, any place who supports school goals or students' learning. This opens up possibilities for more parents and others in the community to be volunteers in middle-grades schools, or at home, or in other locations in the community. A related challenge is to help early adolescents understand that it is o.k. for a parent to be involved in ways that help middle-grades school; students, or other families.

Outcomes. These activities should help reach goals and produce results to increase the contributions made by many families to support school programs; increase families' comfort and familiarity with the school and staff; vary students' communications with adults; increase teachers' readiness to involve families in other ways at home and at school; and improve teachers' awareness of parents' and other community members' abilities to contribute substantively to the school. Other outcomes may include fewer discipline problems due to lower ratios of students to adults, stronger school offerings and more student awareness of opportunities in life due to varied programs offered by volunteers with diverse talents, work, and interests.

Type 4 **Involvement in learning activities at home** refers to requests and guidance from middle-grades teachers for parents to monitor, assist, and interact with their own children at home on learning activities that are coordinated with students' classwork or that contribute to success in school. It also includes parent-initiated, student-initiated, and teacher-directed discussions and interactions about homework or school subjects. Type 4 practices assist families to become more knowledgeable partners about the teachers' curricula and instructional methods; the academic and other skills required to pass each grade, the work their children are doing in class; how to support, monitor, discuss, and help with homework; and how to help students practice and study for tests.

In middle-grades schools, information on the skills needed to pass each course and how families can help at home must come from several teachers of different subjects. It must be clear that the school does not expect families to "teach" school subjects but to encourage, listen, react, praise, guide, monitor, and discuss the work the students bring home. This may be done with interactive homework, student/teacher/family "contracts," long-term projects, or other interactive strategies that keep students and families talking about schoolwork at home.

Other Type 4 practices that middle-grades schools have implemented to keep schoolwork on the agenda at home include videotapes to demonstrate how to motivate early adolescent learners, videos of sample class lessons to discuss at home, pre-unit introductory activities and discussions, summer home learning packets, student demonstrations of newly mastered math skills, and others. (See, for example, Epstein, Jackson & Salinas, TIPS Interactive Homework in the Middle-grades in Language Arts and Science, 1992.)

Challenges. One challenge of successful Type 4 activities is to design and organize a regular schedule of interactive work that enables students to take the leadership role in discussing important and interesting things they are learning, interviewing family members, recording reactions, and sharing written work. This approach helps middle-grades students understand that the school wants their families to know what they are learning in school, and *wants* students to talk over ideas and school decisions at home. A regular weekly or biweekly schedule of interactive homework helps keep families aware of the depth of the curriculum and their children's progress throughout the year. The interactions about homework must be the students' responsibilities, however, without requiring parents to read, write, or teach school subjects. The emphasis is on helping families interact with early adolescents in ways that also help students become more independent learners.

Another challenge is to design homework activities or projects which are responsive to the needs and time available of students and families without putting undue pressure on either. The methods to encourage interaction must not be unduly burdensome on middle-grades teachers who often have many students to teach and many families to reach. Interactive homework should enable parents to send reactions or observations back to the school, maintaining two-way communications on involvement about learning activities, as in the other types.

A general challenge is to design ways to increase the amount of useful information all families receive that will help them continue conversations with their early adolescents about the curriculum, classwork, and positive achievements.

Outcomes. It is this type of involvement that may be most likely to increase student curricular achievements. The interactions and support from family members should help students to improve their homework completion, report card grades, test scores, and other subject specific attitudes and achievements. Students' feelings of competence may increase if they regularly lead enjoyable interactions with their families to demonstrate what they are learning. They also should be more aware that their family knows about the important part of school life -- the learning activities. Teachers' recognition of the part parents play in encouraging students' classroom learning also should increase, and teachers' attention to the design and content of homework should improve. These activities should help reach goals and produce results to increase families' understanding of the school curriculum and how to help at home. More families should be able to support their child by coordinating home and community activities with things their children are learning in school.

Type 5 **Involvement in decisionmaking,** governance, and advocacy refers to parents and others in the community in participatory roles in parent/teacher/student organizations, school advisory councils, school-site decisionmaking or improvement teams, Chapter 1, and other school committees. It also refers to parents as activists in independent education advocacy groups in the community. Middle-grades schools strengthen parent participation in school decisions by encouraging the organization of parent groups and committees and by training parents and students in leadership and decisionmaking skills. Schools assist advocacy groups by providing them with information that will bolster community support for middle-grades school improvement.

In addition to the continuation of active parent organizations, parent representatives on committees are important in middle-grades schools on a wide array of topics that affect the quality of school programs. These include committees on curriculum. safety, supplies and equipment, parent involvement, career development, and other topics for school improvement.

Other Type 5 activities that middle-grades schools have implemented to involve families in school decisionmaking and advocacy include guidelines developed by parent groups that outline how and how much parents are told about middle-grades grouping policies, course selection, placement, and appeals processes. Some practices link types of involvement as when the coordinator of volunteers or parent leaders on specific committees are appointed or elected council members of the PTA/PTO. Parent associations have run clothing exchanges, school stores, fairs, "gold card" discount programs with local merchants, and many other activities. (For other examples of school-based management structures see, Comer, 1980, 1988.)

Challenges. One challenge of successful Type 5 activities is to include parent leaders from all of the racial and ethnic groups, socioeconomic groups, and geographic communities that are present in the middle-grades school. This is a more difficult task in middle and junior high schools that typically draw from a wider and more diverse community than elementary schools. A related challenge is to help parents who are leaders to act as true representatives of the families they serve, with good two-way communications among parents, and between the school and the parent organizations or committees. A third challenge is to include middle-grades student representatives in decisionmaking groups and leadership positions. An ongoing challenge is to assist school committee members to listen to each other, treat each other with respect, and take each other's ideas seriously as they work toward common goals for school improvement.

Outcomes. These activities should help reach goals and produce results to increase families' input on decisions that affect the quality of education for their children, students' awareness that families and students have a say in school policies, and teachers' understanding of family perspectives on policies and programs for improving the school.

Type 6 **Collaborations and exchanges with the community** refer to connections by schools, families, and students with agencies, businesses, religious organizations, cultural, and other groups in the community that share responsibility for children's education and interest in their futures. This includes middle-grades schools' efforts to provide or coordinate students' and families' access to community and support services such as after-school recreation, tutorial programs, health services, cultural events, and other programs.

Middle-grades schools vary in how much they draw on community resources to link to and strengthen work in the other types of involvement, and how much they inform families about these programs. Community resources may be tapped, for example, to provide parent education on adolescent development, as when local mental health groups run workshops in schools (Type 1); to improve schools' communications with families, as when local radio or cable TV stations assist with public service announcements or when churches, clinics, supermarkets, and laundromats assist with important communications from school to home (Type 2); to increase the number of volunteers at the school from the community or enlist business support for workers who are parents to volunteer or attend activities or conferences at the school (Type 3); to enhance and enrich the curriculum and other experiences of students, as when museums or business link their programs and services to school curricula for use in the schools or in the community sites (Type 4); and to extend participation on school committees to business and community representatives (Type 5). Thus, in addition to Type 6 being identifiable as a discrete connection to assist families and schools, community resources also can strengthen the other types of involvement (Epstein and Scott-Jones, in press).

As students enter adolescence their boundaries for exploration and education extend beyond home and school to the neighborhood and wider community. Many students take lessons outside of school, belong to organizations in the community, work or volunteer in the community, or participate in other community activities which have the potential to support and extend school-based learning. Community programs and resources can provide important experiences for students in and out of the school building. Middle-grades schools can work to get the surrounding community to open opportunities to middle-grades students and can help their students obtain equal access to these opportunities.

Other Type 6 activities implemented by middle-grades schools to establish viable collaborations and exchanges with the community include small grants for demonstration projects to improve parent/adolescent communications; b) community organizations' "educational parties" for families in the homes of middle-grades students to increase parental involvement in their children's education and to empower parents with advocacy skill; or community agency fairs to introduce families to local services; c) state legislation or community-developed policies that ask or require employers to allow employees who are parents to attend conferences with their children's teachers and other activities at the schools (including middle-grades schools); d) state support and coordination of education, health, recreation, job training, and other services for 13-19 year-olds including sites at middle schools (see, Center for the Future of Children, 1992); e) business partnerships for improving school programs, students' career explorations and opportunities, teacher internships, mentoring or tutoring programs for direct help to youngsters, mock job interviews, and for other reasons; f) school-sponsored telephone referral systems to community services for teens and families; and g) work-site seminars for workshops for parents who cannot come to the school.

Challenges. One challenge of successful Type 6 activities is to solve the problems often associated with community/school collaborations, such as poor communications about the multiple goals of the school, "turf" problems of who is in charge of collaborative activities, and whose funds are used for what purposes. Another challenge is for middle-grades schools to find ways to link students' valuable learning experiences in the community to the school curricula and to recognize students skills and talents that are developed in their community experiences.

Outcomes. These activities should help reach goals and produce results to increase the knowledge of families, students, and schools about the resources they can tap in their community to help them reach individual and common goals. Also, good coordination of school, family, and community resources should help more students solve some of the problems that arise in early adolescence before they become too serious. Type 6 activities also should support and enrich school curricula and extracurricular programs.

Topics of Special Importance for Practices of Partnership in the Middle Grades

The framework of six types of involvement permits the selection of many different practices of school and family partnerships in the middle-grades. The practices selected also will be influenced by local, state, or national guidelines for school improvement and by emerging new directions for middle-grades reform.

There are many topics concerning the characteristics of early adolescents, the features of middle-grades schools, and teaching practices that influence the design of practices to inform families at this level of schooling. We have selected a few to introduce some issues that may be particularly important to families. They include early adolescent development, transitions to the middle-grades, and specific practices such as interdisciplinary teams, untracking, student assessments, report cards, conferences; and school/community connections. Many other topics and examples are given in the discussion about the six types of involvement on the previous pages. With each topic we raise some questions for debate and discussion that may guide the design of new practices or may suggest questions for new research.

Features of middle-grades schools. Middle-grades practices to involve families will vary from those in the early grades because of many factors -- such as the geographic location of the school, size of school and grade levels, and other organizational features. For example, the organization of programs and some practices of partnership in small K-12, rural schools with about 50 students per grade level will differ from those in large 7-9 junior high schools with over 500 students per grade level. Partnership practices also will change across the middle-grades as developmental changes take early adolescents toward adolescence and young adulthood. That is, the connections with families need to change to reflect the characteristics of sixth graders, the uniqueness of seventh graders, and the status of eighth graders, or the features of students at any grade level in a middle-grades school.

School and Family Partnerships

Here we discuss a few features of early adolescence and middle-grades schools (i.e., the transition from the elementary grades and to high school; interdisciplinary teams; tracking or untracking) that are particularly relevant to the design and content of partnerships with families. There are many other topics about middle-grades schools that may be similarly studied for how they affect school and family partnerships.

Early adolescent development. The most important aspect of middle-grades schools is that they serve early adolescents. There are many characteristics of students at this age, but one worthy of attention is the simultaneous need for greater independence and continued guidance and supervision. This seeming conflict has serious implications for school and family partnerships.

As early adolescents struggle to gain or increase their independence, they may be resistant to family involvement in their middle-grades schools. Recent studies indicate that young adolescents want their families involved as knowledgeable partners at home, but they may not want their peers to know that they still need their families' guidance. Students may not be sure where they fit in school and family partnerships, if neither teachers nor parents acknowledge and explain the students' roles. Data suggest that early adolescents want their families to support them in learning activities at home and accept their assistance in school, but in different roles than were common in the elementary grades (Epstein & Dauber, 1989; Epstein & Herrick 1991; Montaldon & Perrenoud, 1991).

Families and schools also may be initially resistant to practices of family involvement because they may see adolescents in the middle-grades as bigger and older and, therefore, less in need of adult "help." There may be a tendency to reduce involvement and interaction if it is viewed as interfering with the development of student independence. The fact is, however, that students become *more* independent if their families and other adults remain age-appropriately informed and involved in their education (Epstein, 1983).

In research and in practice we need to discuss and study:

- What methods are effective in reducing resistance and increasing acceptance of students, families, and teachers of new school/family partnership practices in the middle-grades?
- How can middle-grades students be given a central role in the design and implementation of family/school partnership practices so that they understand how such practices meet their needs for independence and for guidance?
- What are the benefits to students, parents, and teachers from various practices to inform and involve families in the middle-grades? Which practices have the most benefits for families, without threatening students' development of independence or diminishing their sense of self or feelings of competence?

Transitions from elementary grades and to the high school grades. One of the defining features of the middle-grades is that students usually experience two transitions -- from the elementary to the middle-grades school and from the middle-grades to the high school. Although most schools take time to assist students with these transitions, few schools systematically include families. Yet, each time a student changes schools, the family makes the transition with the child.

At each point of transition, families need good information from schools in order to communicate knowledgeably with their children during these important, exciting, but potentially stressful times. Elementary, middle, and high schools need ways to work separately and together as "feeder" and "receiver" sites to inform and involve families so that they can interact with and assist their children to make successful adjustments to new situations. This includes the orientation to the middle-grades and to new settings and relationships, and the preparations for high-school course work and plans for the future.

Only about 40% of the middle-grades schools in the country have programs that involve the families at key transition points (Epstein, & Mac Iver, 1990). In those that do, the elementary school may start the process by orienting families to the schools their children will attend, first with activities and information at the elementary school, moving on to visits with middle-grades representatives at the elementary and then at the middle-grades school. The middle-grades school may pick up the process of transition with mailings, contacts, and other visits in the summer and into the fall after the transition is made. Similar patterns of pretransition and posttransition information, interactions, and visits are conducted by some feeder and receiver schools as students *and their families* move on to high school. The activities familiarize students and families with the buildings, programs, and changes in courses, expectations, and opportunities that they will meet in their new school.

The data also indicate that middle-grades schools that involve families *before* the transition are more likely to continue other parent involvement practices through the middle-grades. Thus, family involvement at points of transition also helps families continue their involvement with the schools.

In research and in practice we need to discuss and study:

- How can families be prepared to understand the transitions their children will make and to understand the kinds of support that will be helpful to their children?
- What is the most useful schedule, form, and content of articulation activities for families and students be scheduled while students are still in the elementary grades, after the transition to the middle-grades, and before moving on to high school?
- What are the benefits to students, parents, and teachers from practices that include families in the transitions experienced by middle-grades students?

Interdisciplinary teams. One of the common complaints of middle-grades teachers when asked about family involvement is, "I have too many students to pay attention to their families!" Interdisciplinary teams are groups of 4 or 5 teachers of different disciplines who work together in a team or cluster and share responsibility for a common group of about 125-150 students (Epstein &

MacIver, 1990). Teams, created to reduce student anonymity and teacher isolation, may improve family/school partnerships in the middle-grades.

Teachers can work together to inform families about the new forms of teachers' teams, as parents may be unfamiliar with the construct. The teachers on a team may work together to develop effective practices to involve families. One of the most common uses for team planning time is for meetings with parents and students. Conferences are often a team activity, saving parents and teachers time. Teachers who share students can share some of the other activities that require contacting families, can mobilize family support more cohesively, and can coordinate homework assignments that require students to seek family involvement in order to balance demands for family time.

Also, in addition to their contacts with teachers, students and their families on a team have more opportunities to get to know one another, support each other in learning activities, and develop a sense of community through their shared experiences at school.

In research and in practice we need to discuss and study:

- In what ways can interdisciplinary teams offer new opportunities for parents to become better informed about middle-grades programs and features (e.g., courses, grading, opportunities available to their children), and about how to help their early adolescents succeed in the middle-grades?
- How can interdisciplinary teams of teachers "share the load" of designing and implementing family involvement practices for their team?
- What are the benefits to students, parents, and teachers from various practices that teachers on interdisciplinary teams use to inform and involve families?

Untracking. Many middle-grades schools involved in restructuring efforts are changing their practices of tracking students by ability to "untracking" students in mixed-ability classes. Families need to know about the policies and practices that schools use to group their children in various ways, and why the practices have been chosen. In a national study of middle schools that were untracking their classes, principals reported that parents could make or break their efforts to reduce or eliminate tracking, and emphasized the need to involve families early in the process of planning and implementing heterogeneous groups (Wheelock, 1992). Families may be included through informational workshops, observations in classrooms, talking with families in other schools who have experienced successful untracking, giving parents and students choices of placements in some or all heterogeneous or homogeneous classes, discussions through the year about the curriculum, grouping practices, and student progress, and other ways.

In research and in practice we need to discuss and study:

- What kinds of information, and in what forms, do parents need about tracking or untracking in order for them to understand the issues, contribute ideas and suggestions to the school, and support their children in the placements that result?
- What is the student's role in the school's placement policies? How can schools help students and their families if the decision is to move from tracked to "untracked" courses?
- What are the benefits to students, parents, and teachers from contrasting strategies to inform and involve families about grouping strategies?

Student assessment. Alternative assessment strategies are being explored in many states and districts, such as the use of portfolios (e.g., Vermont, Rhode Island), other performance-based assessments, and new standardized tests of higher level skills (e.g., Connecticut, California, Maryland). How should families be informed about new national, state and local standards on which their children will be judged? What should families know about the changes in assessment goals, forms, and content, and about what the new assessments mean for their children's progress and work in school? As one example, "The Portfolio Project," funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, is testing the use of portfolios in eight urban and two rural middle schools, however the role of parents and other family members is not given systematic attention. New standards, tests, and other evaluations can be confusing to families. They need good information about the assessments and about their results in order to support their children as they experience new evaluations, and as they help their children work to improve skills to meet higher standards and to make plans for the future.

In research and in practice we need to discuss and study:

- What information do parents need in order to support a school's adoption of new assessment strategies? ... in order to support their children's participation in new types of tests?
- In what ways should families be involved in designing, implementing, or evaluating alternative assessment strategies? ... in helping other parents understand confusing aspects of tests or other components of middle-grades assessment programs?
- What are the benefits to students, parents, and schools when connections are made with families about new standards and new assessments?

Report cards. While parents generally report satisfaction with the information they receive on report cards, most parents would like more information (Olhausen & Powell, 1992). Parents are rarely asked for input into the design of reporting systems (Reid, 1984). As traditional grading systems are replaced or supplemented with the introduction of alternative assessment strategies, other methods for reporting student progress will be needed and may supplement or replace current report card forms. In the middle-grades, the form and content of report cards often change from those used in the earlier grades, and the components that determine grades also change. Families are usually not informed about these changes, or about how to interpret the grades, or how to guide their early adolescents toward better performance.

In research and in practice we need to discuss and study:

- What information do parents need and want about student achievements, report cards, and progress?
- What roles can students play in developing new methods of reporting progress, making self-assessments, sharing their progress or problems with their families, and working on improving their work and behavior with their teachers and families?
- What are the benefits to students, parents, and teachers when connections are made with families about various forms and contents of report cards?

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Parent/teacher/student conferences. Some suggest that all parent/teacher conferences in the middle-grades should include the student (Deborah Meier, personal communication, 1992), and that all communications between school and family should also be shared with and involve the student. In other words, there should be no parent/teacher conspiracies during early adolescence when the student's skills in self-direction and self-regulation are rapidly developing. Others suggest that there are times when parents and teachers may meet to get to know one another and talk informally, even if the student is not present. Schools need to think about these questions and related practices as they build their connections with families.

In some middle-grades schools that are organized with teacher teams, conferences with parents (or with parents and students) are conducted as a team activity allowing parents to meet with all teachers at one time instead of requiring four or five conferences. Also, in some middle-grades schools, portfolio conferences and other performance-based demonstrations of student achievement may replace traditional parent/teacher conferences. Other schools are devising procedures for a series of three or four conferences a year, akin to the individualized educational plan meetings that have been used in special education, but for all students (as in some Utah demonstration sites). These reformations must be explained to families so that they can participate comfortably. One challenge to educators is to design conference procedures that inform parents of their student's achievements and allow families to share their own perspectives on their child's education and development. (Also see Chrispeels, 1988; Epstein, 1988; and Swap, 1992.) Another challenge is to create an integrated system of student assessments, including report card forms and conferences, to give parents, teachers and students several opportunities to come together to share ideas with each other about how to help students make the greatest progress in their learning and development.

In research and in practice we need to discuss and study:

- What are the purposes of parent/teacher(/student) conferences?
- Are there other methods that enable teachers, students, and families to share information, concerns, and achievements?
- Can students take more active roles in conferences to reflect the student-centered philosophy of middle-grades education and new assessments?
- What are the benefits to students, parents, and teachers from contrasting conferencing strategies?

School/community partnerships. Collaborations or partnerships between schools and universities, businesses, health organizations, and other institutions and associations in the community provide opportunities for schools to offer services to students that the school system alone could not afford to provide. A major challenge to middle-grades schools is to structure these partnerships so that the resources from the community support the school's overall goals for programs, students, and connections with families. For example, mentoring and tutoring programs, school-based health clinics, homework clubs or after school centers, and school/business partnerships rarely include programmatic components to facilitate family involvement. There is a danger that families feel left out or, in some settings, that they are being replaced by well-intentioned but insensitive adults. Families need to be informed of their student's participation in these activities, given information so that they can support their child in the program and discuss their activities.

In research and in practice we need to discuss and study:

- What strategies should be implemented to inform and include families in school/family/-community partnerships?
- What roles should families play in school-business partnerships, mentoring programs, and other activities that link their children with members of the community?
- How should schools organize and structure partnership activities so that all families and students have equal access to services and opportunities offered by school/community partnerships?

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- What are the benefits to students, parents, and teachers from alternative ways of organizing community connections?

Comprehensive School and Family Partnerships

A comprehensive program of partnership includes practices from all six types of involvement that have been selected to help produce specific outcomes of importance to students, to families, and to teachers. Schools develop their programs by providing "the basics" in each of the six types, and adding at least one new practice from each type of involvement each year to reach more and more families. Another way to develop a more comprehensive program is to recognize and work on the challenges associated with each type of involvement in order to improve practices each year. Or, schools may be assisted in program development by considering the components of middle-grades education that families need to understand (the transition to a new school; new rules about attendance; new approaches such as teaming, grouping, grading; and others), and by creating practices to communicate with families about these features that affect their children's success in school.

Comprehensive programs of partnership in the middle-grades can be developed if committees of teachers, parents, students, and others worked together to design or select, implement, and assess practices to accomplish the goals they set together for improving school practices to involve families. A coordinator or lead teacher is needed to oversee and advise the organization and implementation of new activities, or to help solve problems that arise as new practices are tried and tested. Each year, or more frequently, progress should be shared on each of the six types of involvement; practices should be reviewed, continued or improved, dropped or added; excellent work by teachers, families, students, or others in the community should be recognized. Over time, these investments, efforts, and collaborations should lead to more comprehensive programs of partnership to benefit middle-grades students.

Conclusion

The main goals of family and school connections in the years of early adolescence are to help youngsters maintain good health, develop positive attitudes toward learning, continue to succeed in school, and set high expectations, plans, and strategies for high school and for the future. More students will meet these goals if schools, families, and communities join in partnership to work to encourage and assist the children they share.

Families need the school staff to give them information about critical issues facing teens which will help families make decisions with their adolescents. *Schools* need information from families on their goals, values, expectations, interests, and needs to fully understand the children they serve and to help plan school programs that will engage all students. *Middle-grades students* need to know that their families, teachers, and others at school and in the community are available to support them as students and to help them deal with the inevitable challenges of adolescence.

We have summarized a research-based theory, a framework for action, and examples of practices that may help middle-grades schools move beyond rhetoric about parent involvement into productive family/school/community partnerships.

Three themes underlie the design of comprehensive programs of partnerships in the middle-grades: equity, development, and quality. Questions on each theme may help to guide the selection and implementation of practices:

Questions of equity ask: Are all families included and informed so that they can be involved with their own children at home in productive activities to boost student motivation and learning? Are programs and opportunities designed and implemented so that all families feel welcome to participate at school?

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Questions of development ask: Do practices of partnership reflect the changes that occur *from the elementary to the middle-grades* in the characteristics of students, families. and schools? Do practices of partnership also account for the diversity *at each middle grade level* in the characteristics and needs of students, families, and teachers?

Questions of quality ask: Are practices to involve families in their children's education well designed? Are the practices worthy of the time of teachers, parents, and students? Are evaluations conducted to determine if practices are successfully implemented and if they have the effects or results that they were selected to produce?

Middle-grades schools have lagged behind preschools and elementary schools in developing comprehensive programs to involve families. In most middle-grades improvement plans, "parent involvement" is on the list of important components, but is often ignored or treated casually. With the heightened awareness of the importance of the shared responsibilities of schools and families in the education and development of early adolescents, and with advances in theories, research, policies, and practices of partnership, the time is right for middle-grades educators and researchers who study early adolescents and their schools to join the agenda.

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ACTIVITIES IN THE HOME THAT SUPPORT SCHOOL LEARNING IN THE MIDDLE GRADES

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Activities in the Home That Support School Learning in the Middle Grades

Researchers and practitioners now widely acknowledge the importance of understanding the social contexts of students' education and learning. Families and communities, in addition to schools, are recognized as important contexts in which students learn and are educated. Considerable attention has been directed toward the interactions of parents and young children and the activities in the home that support learning and school achievement. Because researchers and practitioners have focused on young children, however, gaps exist in our knowledge of the social contexts of education in early adolescence. Findings from research with young children may not be generalizable to adolescents because of the many developmental differences between the two age groups and the changes in the structure and content of schooling from elementary to middle schools. Parental involvement in learning activities in the home and in school activities declines precipitously after the early elementary grades (Dauber & Epstein, 1992; Epstein, 1986; Stevenson & Baker, 1987). In addition, young adolescents may begin a downward spiral in the middle grades, with a decline in letter grades and in motivation (Eccles et al., 1993). Because of these declines, it is necessary to understand what remains important in home activities through the middle grades and how positive home learning activities can be fostered for middle-grades students.

What are the specific activities in homes that support school learning in the middle grades? With young children, these activities are closely related to children's play and to their toys (see Levenstein, 1988; Scott-Jones, 1987). Home learning activities for young children are "fun"; many toys and games are constructed in a manner that helps children acquire basic concepts and skills. Parents' reading to and with children is an activity that supports the acquisition of early reading skills (Mason & Kerr, 1992) but is also quite enjoyable to most parents and children. In the middle grades, much of home learning activities centers around homework. The change in activities in the home that support school learning is aptly denoted by the use of the word "work". No longer clearly in the realm of fun and play, "homework" is a serious enterprise, to be completed before turning to more pleasant, less structured activities.

Homework is emphasized in this paper as the focus of home learning activities in the middle grades because of its relationship to later achievement. Keith, Reimers, Fehrmann, Pottebaum, and Aubey (1986), using the national High School and Beyond survey, found that time spent on homework had a strong positive effect on reading and mathematics achievement. The parental variables assessed in the study (parents' monitoring of students' school performance, knowledge of students' whereabouts, and influence on students' post-high school plans) had no direct effect on achievement. Television viewing had a small negative effect on achievement. Parents, however, can attempt to influence middle grades students' homework and other related activities in the home.

Some parents may be able to help directly with the skills middle grades students are mastering as they do homework. Many parents, however, may themselves lack some of the skills the students are learning. In addition, some parents who have the needed skills may not be able to sustain positive interactions as they try to teach their young adolescents. Therefore, it is necessary to augment the notion of "parent as teacher", which was developed from work with young children, to include other ways parents influence young adolescents.

Four levels of parental involvement are hypothesized for homework[1]. These levels are valuing, monitoring, helping, and doing. Parental helping focuses on the acquisition of basic skills such as skills in mathematics or reading. Valuing and monitoring are conceptualized as interactions in families affecting students' motivation and engagement in the processes of learning and schooling, even when those interactions are not directly focused on teaching children specific cognitive skills. Finally, we hypothesize a fourth level, doing, in which parents are overly involved in their students' school work -- to the extent of actually doing the work for the students.

Underlying the hypothesized four levels of parental involvement is the lifespan human development perspective. The next section provides a brief overview of this broad theoretical perspective as it relates to learning activities in the homes of middle grades students. The following four sections describe the hypothesized levels of parental involvement in learning activities in the home: valuing, monitoring, helping, and doing. Although the focus is on homework, other aspects of home learning activities are included. The final section of the paper summarizes and suggests future directions for research and practice in home learning in the middle grades.

Life-Span Perspective

The broad theoretical perspective underlying this work is a life span human development perspective, which emphasizes human development in sociocultural and sociohistorical context. The contexts of development -- families, communities, and schools -- are interconnected and are embedded in the larger economic, institutional, and ideological patterns of society (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Epstein, 1987; Epstein & Scott-Jones, in preparation). Diversity -- in socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and family structure -- is an important element of developmental contexts. The life span developmental perspective emphasizes the possibility of change throughout the life span (Lerner, 1986). This perspective is in sharp contrast to the view that children's basic capacity to learn is fixed early in life. The developmental view leads to optimism regarding intervention: Although change may be easier to effect in the preschool or early school years, students' capacity for improvement is not lost as they advance through the middle grades. Continuous attention throughout infancy, childhood, and adolescence is necessary for maximum educational productivity (Stipek, Valentine, & Zigler, 1979). In addition, parents as well as children change over time, and the family's role in education and schooling changes substantially as children progress through the school grades (Scott-Jones, 1988).

Home-School Learning

During the middle school years, children experience many developmental changes. Most notably, children may reach puberty during this time period; girls are, on average, two years ahead of boys in this aspect of their development. The physical changes of adolescence are more rapid and more dramatic than at any other time during the lifespan, with the exception of infancy. Adolescence is an important period in students' lives. As children enter adolescence, they view themselves as gaining in responsibility and independence (Pipp, Shaver, Jennings, Lamborn, & Fischer, 1985). Many young adolescents make decisions and engage in behaviors that have lasting effects on their adult lives. The middle grades may be important to students' later career aspirations and goals. For example, Clewell and Anderson (1992) concluded that the middle grades are a crucial time when female students are in the greatest danger of leaving the science track. Continued engagement in school during the middle grades is critical for later educational success and for the prevention of social problems, such as drug abuse and unplanned pregnancy, that currently plague American youth.

In addition to changes within the individual, the structure of schools changes in the middle grades. Students make an important transition from elementary school to middle school. Middle schools may diminish the teacher-student relationship (August, 1988). The typical elementary school organization, in which one teacher remains with students for the entire school day, is replaced by departmentalized instruction, with different teachers responsible for different subjects (McPartland, 1987; McPartland, Coldiron, & Braddock, 1987). There is a relatively high rate of teacher turnover (Darling-Hammond cited in August, 1988) and teachers' sense of their own efficacy may diminish (Eccles et al., 1993). In addition, African-American and other minority students may not be taught by minority teachers. Although the proportion of minorities in the student population has increased, the proportion of minorities in the teaching force has declined sharply. In 1971, almost 12% of teachers were minorities; by the year 2000, that proportion is expected to drop below 5% (Nicklos & Brown, 1989).

The structure of middle schools may diminish the sense of belongingness among students and their parents that might have been present in the elementary years. Many academic and adjustment problems, which may have had their origins in the earlier grades, become apparent or are exacerbated (August, 1988). Middle school programs and practices often do not encourage parental involvement; parents and teachers may have negative views of one another. Extensive interviews of teachers and parents in two junior high schools serving low-income African-American populations indicated that teachers tend to blame parents for their children's problems. Parents located some problems within themselves and their circumstances but also cited teachers' attitudes and behavior as problems (Leitch & Tangri, 1988; Tangri & Leitch, 1982).

Change also is occurring for the parents of adolescents (see Demick, Bursik, & Dibiase, 1993, for broad discussion of parental development). Adolescents' parents will be of different ages and at different points in their own development. For some adolescents, other relatives such as grandparents may act as parents. Typically, adolescents' parents, compared to the parents of younger children, are facing greater economic pressures, more job responsibilities, more marital dissatisfaction, and more health problems. These various aspects of parents' lives will affect their engagement in learning activities with their young adolescents in the home. Parents must strive to maintain a balance between control and responsiveness as their young adolescents become increasingly independent.

Because of the extensive and sometimes abrupt changes that occur in students, schools, and parents in the middle grades, many barriers to positive learning activities in the home may exist. Adolescents, however, greatly need assistance and support in the family. Adolescents need to maintain a sense of connectedness to the family at the same time they begin to establish an individual identity and a sense of independence (Cooper, Grotevant, & Condon, 1983).

Home-School Learning

Valuing

We hypothesize that an important component of the academic socialization of middle grades students is the direct and indirect communication of the value of education. Parents' valuing of learning, education, and schooling is part of parents' belief system which in turn serves as a cognitive mediator of parents' interactions with their children (see Scott-Jones, 1984, for review). Communication regarding the prestige and authority of the teacher (Ginsburg et al., 1992) is important as is communication regarding respect of the school as an institution. Much of what children learn about the value of education may result, not from direct teaching by parents, but from children's observation of parents in their everyday lives (Nickerson, 1992). Parental beliefs about effort and ability, and messages they convey to children about the value of effort and ability, may be important. Bempechat (1992) suggests that Asian and Asian-American parents' strong belief in the value of effort is related to their children's high achievement. Placing a high value on the role of personal effort in achievement, and a correspondingly low value on the role of innate abilities, is thought to lead to children's being disciplined and persistent even when their school work is difficult.

In addition to conveying the value of education and schooling generally, parents need to convey the value of specific subjects such as mathematics (Marshall, 1992). Parents and students should believe that mathematical knowledge gives them personal power in their lives. Marshall (1992) gives examples of ways parents can establish the value of mathematics by working with students on projects, such as building a stereo cabinet or deciding on and purchasing items for a party, that require some knowledge of and use of mathematics. Marshall's examples, however, are of activities more likely to occur in middle- and upper-income homes than in poor homes. Researchers and practitioners need to direct more attention toward activities that would be feasible for a broad range of families and students.

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Nickerson (1992) argues that the transmission of values, beliefs, and attitudes that motivate the development of cognitive skills, and the humane use of those skills, is more important than the transmission of the skills. Without denying the importance of skills, Nickerson asserts that a higher priority should be placed on parents' transmitting to their children a sense of inquisitiveness, love of learning, awareness of their own intellectual potential, and a commitment to fairmindedness. In spite of the importance of family values regarding education, Ginsburg et al. (1992) suggest that programs cannot teach parents to convey these values to their children. These authors assert that values develop in a complex manner and cannot be taught in relatively brief training sessions. Further, according to these authors, social and economic conditions in society may weaken parental valuing of education, particularly in low-income and minority groups. Ginsburg et al. (1992) suggest that programs may provide experiences that influence parents' construction of their values and beliefs related to education. Further, Eccles and Harold (1993) suggest that involving middle grades parents in school governance is important for learning activities in the home. Eccles and Harold suggest that if parents help to develop school goals, they are more likely to agree with them, to become invested in them, and to foster them at home.

Monitoring

Parents' monitoring includes establishing rules regarding homework, establishing a routine and schedule for students' studying and completing homework, and checking that homework is completed. Also important is monitoring activities that might interfere with schoolwork such as television viewing. Monitoring is enhanced when parents are aware of the kinds of courses students take and how students are performing in those courses. Parental awareness of students' courses and performance levels appears to vary according to socioeconomic status. Baker and Stevenson (1986) interviewed mothers of eighth-graders who were making the transition from middle school to high school.

Mothers with high educational levels were more likely than other mothers to be able to identify the student's best and worst subjects.

Another aspect of parental monitoring is helping the middle grades student to develop self-monitoring or self-management skills. Students need experience in planning. For example, students need to learn to plan the amount of time to be spent on homework. For long-term projects, they need to plan the timing and sequence of work from beginning to deadline. Non-school tasks, including chores, hobbies, and household and family management, are hypothesized to support school learning indirectly through the middle grades students' acquisition of self-management skills and learning strategies: planning, persistence, practice, flexibility, and confidence. Parents can help their middle grades students acquire these self-management skills and learning strategies as they perform non-school-tasks.

Parental monitoring of middle grades students is complicated by the young adolescents' needs to establish some level of autonomy while still benefitting from the protection and guidance of parents. Adolescence is no longer characterized as a time when young people necessarily break away from or reject their parents (Cooper et al., 1983). Instead, the relationship with parents becomes transformed during this time. Adolescents establish their independence and individuality but also maintain a connectedness to their families.

Adolescents perceive their parents as gradually exerting less control (Dornbusch et al., 1987; Steinberg, 1987). Parental influence may become more indirect as adolescents internalize parental values and use those values when they have opportunities for independent decision-making. Parental control is not relinquished entirely, however. Parental control appears to become increasingly domain specific. For example, middle-class White 12- to 19-year-olds gradually gain control over their style of dress but believe their parents retain the right to set standards for their school performance (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Parents still may establish rules and monitor the adolescents' behavior.

Parents also may communicate with adolescents regarding important aspects of their behavior and development, encourage adolescents to express their own opinions and feelings, and respond to input from adolescents in setting and enforcing rules.

Students' school performance is positively associated with parents' exerting firm control, through clear standards for behavior, but also responding to adolescents' needs and desires, allowing them input into decisions, and maintaining open communication (Dornbusch et al., 1987). In a long-standing typology, this parenting style, consisting of appropriately high levels of both control and responsiveness, is labeled authoritative (Baumrind, 1966; 1991). In contrast, authoritarian parents are high on control and low on responsiveness; permissive parents are low on control and high on responsiveness.

Ethnic and socioeconomic status differences may exist in these parenting styles (Baumrind, 1972). According to Dornbusch et al. (1987), Asian, Black, and Hispanic adolescents reported higher levels of authoritarian parenting than did Whites. Adolescents from lower socioeconomic status families rated their parents higher on the indicators of authoritarian parenting than did middle-socioeconomic-status adolescents. Further, the positive relationship between authoritative parenting and school performance was greatest for White students. Baumrind's typology was developed from studies of middle-income White children and families. Comparisons with other groups may be misleading (Baumrind, 1972). Careful study of various family contexts may be needed to clarify parents' use of control and responsiveness.

Clark (1983) provided case-study descriptions of high- and low-achieving Black high school seniors, all from low-income single- or two-parent families. Although Clark did not use Baumrind's typology, the dimension of control figured prominently in the homes of high-achievers. Parents of high-achievers appeared to exert control over their children and supervise them closely but not excessively. These parents believed that education was a means of social mobility; they monitored homework and interacted positively with the school. In contrast, low-achieving students' families appeared to be in a state of great despair. With fewer social and material resources than the families of high-achievers, the families of low-achievers had struggled unsuccessfully for many years and appeared resigned to their economic conditions.

Monitoring of young adolescents may be more difficult when there is limited parental time or only one parent in the home but the actual effect of family structure may have been exaggerated. Recent structural changes in families, particularly the rise in single-parent households and in employment of mothers outside the home, have been cited as reasons for the problems adolescents experience. These changes in families are interpreted by some as representative of a decline in parental commitment to their children. To test this hypothesis, Furstenberg and Condran (1988) analyzed data on family structure and on measures of adolescent well-being for African-Americans and Whites from 1940 to 1980. The researchers concluded that the empirical evidence does not support a link between family change and change in adolescent behavior during this time period. For example, the percentage of 18- to 24-year-old African-Americans who graduated from high school increased as their family conditions were deteriorating. Further, the correspondence between family change and change in adolescent well-being is lower for African-Americans than for Whites.

The community or neighborhood in which the family lives may affect parents use of control with adolescents. Parents who live in neighborhoods where high achievement in school is not the norm, and where drugs and violence may pull young adolescents from their focus on school, may find it necessary to use strict controlling strategies and to monitor students closely. These parents may exert high levels of control, in comparison to parents who live in safer neighborhoods, but the control and monitoring may be appropriate for the context. Similarly, adolescents' behavior may affect parents' use of control. Adolescents who do not follow rules may lead parents to exert more control than is beneficial.

The potential negative outcomes of parental control may be offset by the responsiveness of parents to their children. A responsive parent is informed about and sensitive to the young adolescents' developing skills and behavior and thus is able to provide appropriate control. Responsiveness incorporates the affective component of the parent-adolescent relationship. Parents may monitor and control adolescents' behavior effectively in the context of a responsive and caring relationship.

The role parental monitoring can play is illustrated in Dr. Benjamin S. Carson's description of his school and family experiences ("Scientist at Work", 1993). Dr. Carson, a noted pediatric neurosurgeon, is African-American and grew up in a low-income urban area in a single-parent home. Recalling that he was considered the "class dummy" in fifth grade, he indicated that he began to excel because of his mother's requirements. She restricted him and his brother to two or three television programs per week and required them to read and write reports for her on two books per week from the public library. His performance turned around; he finished high school third in his class and went to Yale on an academic scholarship. Years later, Dr. Carson discovered that his mother could not read those book reports. Thus, parental monitoring can be beneficial even in the absence of parental academic skills.

Helping

To help directly with school skills, parents of middle grades students must themselves possess the skills and must be able to gauge when they have given an appropriate amount of help--not too much and not too little. Parents' helping their children may follow the model of expert-novice or apprenticeship learning. In this model, parents are knowledgeable about the topic students are learning and, if the interactions have the appropriate emotional tone, can provide invaluable assistance. Parents help only as needed and gradually move the child to higher levels of independent performance (see Rogoff, 1990, for discussion of this model developed mainly for young children).

Alternatively, parents' helping may follow the model of learning together. In this model, parents may learn about a subject along with the student. Finally, when parents have exhausted their resources for helping, they may contribute by identifying other sources of help for the young adolescent. Each of these three models is discussed below in relation to middle grades students and their parents.

Expert-novice. One aspect of parents' helping with homework that may change as children progress from elementary to middle schools is the parents' own mastery of the specific content of various subjects middle grades students are learning. An adequate level of literacy is required for parents to help with students' learning activities at home. Middle grades students' academic work is more difficult than that of elementary school students. Unlike the preschool and early elementary years, when many parents can help children acquire basic concepts, such as shape and number, and can read simple stories, in the middle grades students must acquire increasingly complex and abstract knowledge and skills. Parents who provided appropriate learning activities for their young children may have more difficulty when their children are in the middle grades. Parents' helping with homework is a radically different enterprise for a parent of a sixth-grader than for the parent of a second-grader. Older students may have closed the knowledge gap between themselves and their parents in some subject areas; in addition, older students in general do not value close parental teaching interactions as much as young children.

Parents' skills may not be adequate for the level of work required in the middle grades. In addition, parents may feel themselves unable to provide assistance, or students may perceive their parents as lacking in requisite skills. Any of the these possibilities -- the actual lack of parental academic skills, or the parents' or students' perception of a lack of parental skills -- could lead to less parental help with homework in middle than in elementary schools.

Parents may have difficulty helping with schoolwork even before students reach the middle grades. Parents of third- through fifth-graders who participated in a family mathematics intervention program reported problems in providing guidance with homework (Sloane, 1990). Parents were concerned about their own lack of knowledge beyond simple arithmetic and about possible differences between the methods they used to help their children and the methods teachers used. In addition to these concerns about cognitive skills and teaching strategies, parents also were concerned about the affective quality of helping interactions; parents or children sometimes felt frustrated and unhappy during homework help sessions. These concerns occurred in this sample even though the participating mothers far exceeded the level of formal education one would expect to be necessary to help third - fifth graders; 53% of Caucasian, 21% of African-American, 17% of Native American, and 6% of Hispanic mothers had completed college and some had taken graduate level courses.

Parents cannot teach children skills they do not themselves possess and exercise regularly in their own lives (Chipman, 1992; Scott-Jones, 1987). When parents are highly skilled in the subjects middle grades students are learning, however, parents can act as tutors. One-on-one tutoring has great advantages over the group instruction of classrooms (Chipman, 1992). In these interactions, parents are "experts" giving individual attention and instruction to the "novice" or "apprentice".

Mathematics and science have been the focus of some home learning intervention programs, because American children lag behind children in other countries in these subject areas. In addition, within the United States, African-American and Hispanic students lag behind White students in mathematics and science achievement and are underrepresented in careers related to mathematics and science (Clewell, Anderson, & Thorpe, 1992). Family Math (Shields & David, 1988; Stenmark, Thompson, & Cossey, 1986) is a program developed to improve the mathematics achievement of students from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Family Math emphasizes increasing the involvement of females and ethnic minorities in mathematics and increasing the involvement of families in their children's mathematics education. The focus of the program is on problem solving and everyday uses of mathematics. Trainers demonstrate activities and teaching styles to be used by parents at home. An example of the tasks used in Family Math is playing with dice to learn the concept of probability (Stenmark et al., 1986).

Recruitment of parents into programs such as Family Math may be a problem. Thompson reported that 7 to 15 parents participated in Family Math sites. Although recruitment may be a problem, the implementation of Family Math has been undertaken with families described as hard to reach (Shields & David, 1988). Family Math programs initially were offered through schools and reached suburban communities. Through community agencies, Family Math was established in poor and minority communities. Shields and David (1988) report on five sites, including Hispanic, African-American, and Native American Indian communities. Family Math classes were held in libraries, homes, and schools. Shields and David conclude that Family Math can be as effective in low-income minority communities as in more affluent communities. No evaluations of these implementations are reported, however.

Two evaluations of Family Math are reported in Clewell et al., (1992). Both evaluations focused on parents' attitudes and behaviors following participation in the program. The majority of parents reported positive changes in their attitudes toward mathematics, their knowledge of mathematics, and their assistance with their children's mathematics homework. In addition, more than half of the parent participants later conducted or assisted in Family Math classes or pursued more mathematics education for themselves. Clewell et al., (1992) do not report any evaluation of students' mathematics achievement following participation in Family Math (Stenmark et al., 1996).

The evaluation of Family Math with third- to fifth-graders and their families reported by Weisbaum (1990) also indicated that parents, who usually were mothers, became more positive about mathematics and about helping their children with mathematics homework. Overall, however, parents did not consider mathematics one of their favorite subjects. Although all parents held a deep commitment to their children's education, the majority did not use Family Math activities in the home. Parents used the teaching strategies learned in Family Math to help children with their homework. Direct assessment of children's mathematics achievement was not included in this evaluation and few parents reported improved mathematics grades for their children.

Elementary students enrolled in a Saturday Family Math and Science program showed achievement gains after one year. Sessions, including field trips and sessions at the schools, were held once each month during the school year. Participants showed a 1.1 grade-equivalent increase in mathematics and a 1.3 grade-equivalent increase in science on the Metropolitan Achievement Tests, compared to a .7 grade-equivalent increase for non-participants in both subjects.

An additional troublesome aspect of reports of such programs is that the complexity and abstract nature of mathematics may not be adequately recognized. For example, Shields and David's (1988) report of Family Math indicates that practical activities such as estimating a grocery bill put parents on equal footing with teachers. When older children are learning more advanced mathematical concepts, however, parents' practical knowledge may not be equivalent to teachers' or students knowledge. Interventions such as Family Math need to address the skill levels required of parents at different grade levels.

The attitude of teachers toward parents' providing learning activities at home is important. Ginsburg et al. (1992) suggest that teachers, because they want to control the process of learning, may be threatened by parents' providing "uncontrolled" learning experiences at home. Teachers are actively involved in the intervention developed by Joyce Epstein. Based on her research linking teachers' practices of parental involvement with students' achievement, Epstein developed a program called Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS). TIPS includes activities to involve parents in students' homework. The homework assignments require the student to interact with an adult at home regarding an interesting topic from current class work. The interactive homework is expected to convey to the student that parents believe schoolwork is important. TIPS mathematics and language assignments are scheduled once each week; science activities are scheduled twice each month. TIPS activities involve active learning, rather than memorization, and are designed so that parents cannot simply do the homework for the student. Although TIPS activities are designed to be enjoyable, the assignments are graded.

A variation of TIPS is the development of summer home learning packets for seventh- and eighth-graders, to provide opportunities for continued learning of mathematics and language over the summer (Epstein & Herrick, 1991). The reactions of parents and students to the summer home learning packets were assessed via surveys. Almost one-third of the students indicated that a parent or other adult worked with them at least some of the time. Approximately one-third of parents and students stated they needed more instructions in the use of the packets.

Survey results were used to improve the TIPS packets. Epstein and Herrick (1991) then implemented the TIPS summer home learning program with African-American seventh-graders. Students' spring English grades and standardized reading and language test scores were used as pretest scores; posttests administered in the fall assessed the skills targeted in the summer TIPS packets. Almost one-fourth of the students worked on most or all of the TIPS activities with a parent; 41% of the students did not work on any activities with a parent. Pretest scores were not related to amount of work on the TIPS activities but school attendance was related to completion of TIPS activities. Females were more likely than males to complete TIPS activities, even after attendance was controlled. Analyses of posttest scores indicated that the greater the number of TIPS activities completed, the higher the posttest scores. Pretest scores also were correlated with posttest scores, and controlling for pretest scores resulted in no significant independent effect of TIPS use. Further analyses, however, indicated that, although good students remained good students regardless of TIPS use, for "fair" students, high TIPS users had higher posttest scores than low TIPS users.

Epstein and Herrick (1991) also report the results of an evaluation of two newsletters, a general newsletter from the principal and a newsletter on school workshops on helping students at home, distributed in an urban middle school. A telephone survey was conducted with a representative sample of families of sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-graders. The majority of respondents were mothers; almost one-third had completed high school and an additional 28% had completed some college. Almost one-half of the families were not aware of either newsletter. The majority of parents, however, said they wanted more information about helping their children at home.

Learning together. Any effort to encourage learning activities at home must take into account the current status of literacy among American adults. Only a small percentage of adults is completely illiterate, that is, lacking the rudimentary literacy skills of reading and writing. A larger percentage lacks functional literacy skills needed to negotiate everyday life in a technological society. An even larger percentage of adults may lack "empowering" literacy skills, the advanced literacy skills enabling individuals to comprehend complex ideas and phenomena and to engage in discourse on complex issues. It is this aspect of literacy -- reading to master complex subjects -- that poses the greatest problem in the United States today (Athey & Singer, 1987).

Programs to support learning activities in the home for middle grades must recognize and make accommodations for variations in literacy levels among parents. For young children and their parents, intergenerational literacy programs have been developed, in which both parents and children learn to read. This model of learning together could be adapted for some middle grades home learning activities, for situations in which parents lack some specific skills but have the requisite basic skills. Although parents contribute to children's academic performance in other ways, such as by encouraging and rewarding achievement, direct help with specific school skills is limited for many parents. In addition, parents may be able to provide help with some subjects but not others

Home-School Learning

Related to parents' literacy levels is their proficiency in English. Parents with limited English proficiency may have great difficulty helping their middle grades students with school work. In some instances, students' English proficiency may surpass that of their parents and students may be in a position to help their parents.

An example of the influence parents can have when they must learn along with their children comes from a university professor's description of his childhood and his father in Nigeria. Although this example is from a culture different from the United States, similar relationships undoubtedly exist in many cultural groups. The father was barely literate but the son credits his father with fostering the son's mental development.

> *My father was the type of semi-literate villager who would buy a newspaper during a visit to the nearby township and then spend a whole week spelling his way through it. When I learned to read, he made me read newspapers or the Local Government Ordinance to him, first in English and then translated into Igbo, a test of the education I was supposed to be getting...My father was my mentor, trainer...* (Echewa, 1993)

Identifying sources of help. When parents are not able to help directly, they may be able to identify sources of help, if such help is available. The concept of social support as an important buttress to parenting (Slaughter-Defoe, 1992) should be included in efforts to increase learning activities in the home. Siblings or other adults in home may be able to provide help to students in the middle grades. In addition, parents might harness and channel peer relations, which are becoming important in the middle grades, by encouraging joint out-of-school projects in the home with middle grades students and their friends.

Parents also can help by identifying sources of support in the school and community. Homework hotlines may be provided by schools or community agencies. Individual tutors may also be available. Communities may provide programs that focus on school skills. Of the community after-school programs studied by the Center for Early Adolescence (Davidson & Koppenhaver, 1988), some were sponsored by community agencies such as churches, businesses, and social-service agencies.

Few programs were for early adolescents and, in most of these, young adolescents were the oldest eligible participants in programs designed for elementary school children. Examples of after-school community literacy programs from Davidson and Koppenhaver's (1988) study include an East Harlem community literacy center for all ages and levels of readers, including adults, operated from a combination library-bookstore; an individual tutoring program developed in Chicago in 1965 by a corporation and a housing project; and a program in which college and high-school students tutor younger Native American students. Davidson and Koppenhaver (1988) found that public libraries were unlikely to sponsor programs for adolescents, which is surprising given that libraries have provided literacy programs for children and for adults. Davidson and Koppenhaver (1988) also found community-based literacy programs that were part of comprehensive services to families and children. One program, the Philadelphia Federation of Settlement Houses, includes among its activities after-school, summer school, and summer camp programs to enhance the literacy skills of young adolescents. The summer day camp program provides literacy enhancement activities along with the usual swimming and arts and crafts. A summer residential camp that provides literacy instruction is being developed.

The community or neighborhood also can affect the focus of activities in the home. Characteristics of the neighborhood can direct parents and middle grades students away from enriching activities to those focused on safety, avoiding trouble, and eventually escaping from the neighborhood. The many problems of poor urban neighborhoods are widely acknowledged. Illegal drugs and associated violence create an unsafe atmosphere for families in these neighborhoods. Families may be in physical danger and developing adolescents may be exposed to lifestyles that are not conducive to high educational achievement. The family's provision of home learning activities is made more difficult when the neighborhood has few elements that value or require high educational achievement. An ongoing study of young adolescents' neighborhoods (Eccles & Harold,

1993) finds that parents from less risky neighborhoods are able to take advantage of available neighborhood resources whereas parents in high-risk, low-resource neighborhoods must rely on what they can do in the home; the latter group of parents emphasizes protecting their young adolescents from outside dangers. According to Garbarino and Sherman (1980), the neighborhood provides the ecological niche that "makes or breaks" low-income families.

Urban African-American communities are often discussed in terms of potential negative effects on adolescents. African-American communities, however, continue to be important in augmenting the efforts of families to socialize their children toward achievement (Billingsley, 1968, 1992). Community members, in formal roles as teachers and ministers, as well as in informal roles, provide models and direct help for African-American youth. Billingsley (1968, 1992) singled out the Black church as having an especially positive impact. The church may not necessarily be in the physical neighborhood in which a family resides. "Community", then, can be defined by organizations chosen by families. The "church community" or the "church family" may be important in some adolescents' achievement.

Doing

Parents with low literacy skills may have difficulty helping their middle grades students. Another problem arises when parents are highly skilled and find it more efficient and more effective to do school work for children, instead of helping and guiding their children. Parents' motivation to help may lead to overinvolvement in young adolescents' schoolwork. Overinvolved parents may complete projects that young adolescents should do for themselves. Parents' goal should be to help young adolescents acquire or practice skills. Parents must judge when and how much to help and must encourage children to take responsibility for their own work.

Parents should foster an active role on the part of the student. The student's decisions to seek help from parent or from other sources should be monitored by parents. When parents do provide help, they must not dominate the helping interaction.

The affective relationship between parent and adolescent is important. Successful instruction occurs in contexts that have positive social meanings (Reder, 1992). Parents' helping adolescents with homework needs to be a positive social interaction rather than a negative or coercive interaction. Students in middle grades are moving toward increased independence and need a supportive environment in which to realize their achievement strivings. Eccles et al. (1993) suggest that there is a mismatch between young adolescents' needs for autonomy and both the home environment and the school environment. The lack of fit between young adolescents' needs and their experiences in home and school can lead to conflict. According to Eccles et al., young adolescents perceive their opportunities for decision-making to be less than they want and need.

Summary and Future Directions

Activities in the home that support school learning are affected by a complex array of factors: characteristics of the middle grades student; characteristics of parents; siblings; other adults in the household; peers; resources in the community; and characteristics of the school. The content and impact of home learning activities are affected by the interaction of these variables. Programs to support learning activities in the home must take into account these interacting variables.

Program developers also should bear in mind that parental involvement in learning activities in the home is only one of several important connections between families and schools. Epstein and Connor (1992) outlined six types of connections between home and school; Epstein's earlier work outlined five types. The six are: basic obligations of families to provide for children; basic obligations of schools to communicate with parents; parental involvement at school; parental involvement in learning activities in the home; parental involvement in school governance and decision-making; and collaborations and exchanges with the community.

Program developers must give careful attention to the characteristics of the school and teacher practices. In addition to variations in quality of education provided, schools may differ in the extent to which they support and encourage home learning. Teachers assign homework. A school or district may have specific policies and practices related to homework. Families' role in homework, therefore, is necessarily constrained by the schools' or teachers' decisions regarding homework. In addition, in the middle grades, where teaching is departmentalized, homework in each subject may be assigned by a different teacher.

In spite of the general consensus that parental influence is strong, Nickerson (1992) cautions us that the details of how parents influence children's thinking have not been empirically established. Nickerson further asserts that the research community has not communicated well with parents, and that books for parents typically are written in ways that oversimplify or distort what we know. Similarly, Slaughter-Defoe (1992) questions whether our knowledge base is sufficient to support the development and implementation of effective programs for parents. Thus, interventions must be cautious and carefully evaluated. Typically, programs have limited funds that are used to provide services rather than to set up evaluations. Program developers often must rely upon anecdotal evidence of their programs' success.

Programs to enhance learning activities in the home must take into account the pervasive poverty in American society. These programs cannot have a far-reaching impact unless other reforms take place in the quality of schooling and the structure of the economy (Ginsburg et al., 1992). Approximately one-fifth of children under 18 years of age live below the poverty level (Bane & Ellwood, 1989; Children's Defense Fund, 1990). The proportion of adolescents living in poverty has increased steadily since the mid-1970s (Furstenberg & Condran, 1988). Although poverty is wide-ranging, affecting many White and two-parent working families (Bane & Ellwood, 1989), a disproportionate number of African-American and Hispanic children and of children in single-parent families live in poverty. According to the Children's Defense Fund (1990), 44% of Black, 36% of Hispanic, and 15% of White children live in poverty.

Although poverty is associated with low achievement, some children from poor families perform well in school and some middle-income children have difficulties. In the National Longitudinal Survey of Young Americans, the majority of 14- and 15-year-olds who had inadequate basic skills were poor. Poor students with good basic skills, however, were no more likely to drop out of high school two years later than were their more affluent counterparts (August, 1988).

The framework developed in this paper is one that allows the development of a set of activities that would be appropriate for the broad range of families and students we hope to reach in our educational system. Many parents engage in learning activities in the home and could use their experiences to contribute to program development. The hypothesized four levels of parental involvement in learning activities at home are listed below, with some proposed guidelines for each.

Valuing

1. Parents need to reflect on, formulate, or reformulate broad educational values. Schools can assist by allowing parents to be involved in school governance, in the setting of or commenting on school goals and values. Schools can provide parents the opportunity to reflect on and discuss their educational values. Schools' educational values and goals for all middle grades students should be clear and should be conveyed clearly to parents.
2. Parents need to **communicate** the **general educational values** to their middle grades students. **Specific expectations** for the individual student also should be conveyed. Parents need to convey these values and expectations both directly in their

conversations and indirectly through their behavior and everyday interactions with middle grades students.

3. Parents need to emphasize the importance of students' **effort** and avoid making negative attributions to students' **ability**.
4. Parents need to emphasize the importance of **specific subjects**, such as mathematics, and their relationship to everyday life and later careers.

Monitoring

1. Parents need **information** from the school about the amount of homework to expect in various subjects, and students' performance and skills, so that they have realistic and appropriate expectations.
2. Parents need to exercise firm **control** by setting and enforcing rules and checking on adolescents' compliance in homework and related activities. Because young adolescents need to develop a sense of autonomy, parental control must be tempered by an appropriate degree of **responsiveness** to adolescents' feelings, needs, and wants.

Helping

1. Parents who are highly skilled in a subject can help to teach the middle-grades student in an **expert-novice** or **apprenticeship** model. As middle grades students become proficient in their academic subjects, they may close the "knowledge gap" between themselves and their parents in some subjects. Parents may be unable to help directly.
2. Parents' helping may follow the model of **learning together**. Some parents help by learning along with the student. Parents acquire skills and knowledge in order to help their students, and students may, in turn, help their parents.

3. When parents have exhausted their own resources for helping, they may contribute by **identifying sources of help**. Resources in the community, the school, other family members, and even the adolescents' peer group can serve as an important buttress to parenting.

Doing

1. Parents must set appropriate **limits on helping**. Parents must judge carefully how much help to give so that the middle grades student increases in responsibility, autonomy, and competence.
2. Parents must establish an appropriate emotional tone and avoid conflict in attempting to help their middle grades students. Parents must avoid a **mismatch** between the adolescents' need for autonomy and the parents' desire to control interactions with the adolescent.

Footnotes

1. This conceptualization is from the author's ongoing study of parental involvement, which is part of the national Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning, funded under the Educational Research and Development Center Program (Agreement No. R117Q00031) as administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education.

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BRINGING SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES TOGETHER IN PREPARATION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY:

IMPLICATIONS OF THE CURRENT EDUCATIONAL REFORM MOVEMENT FOR FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT POLICIES

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Bringing Schools and Communities Together in Preparation for the 21st Century: Implications of the Current Educational Reform Movement for Family and Community Involvement Policies

Overview

Current efforts to improve the nation's schools depart radically from previous reform movements in their willingness to question the basic structures of the system of educating our children. Unlike earlier efforts that sought to extend the benefits of the current system to excluded groups or that worked to increase the quantity of education received by all children, today's reforms seek to redesign schools from the bottom up in order to create new institutions for the 21st Century.

Underlying this reform movement are a number of assumptions that are very different than those guiding the reforms of the late 1960's, the 1970's, and the early to mid-1980's. First, we have come to understand that teaching and learning has to focus on the acquisition of critical thinking skills for all students. Second, we recognize that the school, not the statehouse or Washington, is the appropriate locus for decisions about how to improve teaching and learning. Third, changing the teaching and learning environment while giving school staff more responsibility for designing that environment will require much more from teachers and administrators. Fourth, in return for the increased responsibilities, schools must be held more accountable for their outcomes. Finally, districts, states, and the federal government will have to assume new roles to provide the resources and assistance necessary to enable school staff to take on these new challenges.

This vision of school improvement compels us to create a new conception of the appropriate relationship between the school and its community, parents, and families. Pedagogically, as we have come to know the importance of rooting learning in children's real lives, we can no longer tolerate the artificial boundaries between the classroom and the home. Politically, as we move the authority for decisionmaking down to those closest to children, we cannot afford to exclude parents and community members from the process of crafting new schools. Nor can we avoid being held more directly accountable to the immediate community constituency for decisions made at the school site.

Bringing Schools and Communities Together

Practically, schools have no chance of enacting the fundamental changes on the reform agenda in the absence of wholehearted support from their entire community (parents, citizens, and business).

The idea that schools can best succeed by isolating themselves and their students from the community has been discredited. As we move toward the next century, the improvement of our schools will have to be accompanied by closer connections between schools and their communities, teachers and families.

In this paper, I explore the implications of the current reform agenda for governmental policies concerning the involvement of communities, families, and parents. The underlying questions I will try to address are: (l) What are the most appropriate roles for parents and communities in the current efforts to improve schooling?; and (2) What policies should federal, state, or local decisionmakers put in place to support this involvement? Where relevant, I focus special attention on policies related to the middle grades (4-8).

In the following section, I provide a brief review of the history of educational reform and parent involvement policies over the past few decades. I then describe how the current wave of reform differs from previous efforts and discuss the implications for parent and community participation in the schools. Based on this discussion, I outline a set of policy recommendation for decisionmakers at all levels of the educational system. Finally, I point to some promising directions for future research.

A Brief History of Educational Reform and Policies on Parent Involvement

The modern history of educational reform begins with the Great Society legislation designed to address the needs of "disadvantaged" populations. The legislation began with Head Start in the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), continued with Follow Through (1967), The Bilingual Education Act, the Migrant Education Act, and perhaps ended with the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975).

This set of laws was based on the premise that although we know how to educate children, certain subsets of children are excluded, by the lack of ability or will on the part of state and local officials, from equal opportunities for quality education. Each program then sought to increase children's opportunities by providing funds to local governments (or community agencies) and requiring that the funds be spent on specific categories of activities (e.g., basic reading skills, health services) and for specific types of children (poor, limited English-speaking, etc.)

These programs reflected federal policymakers' beliefs that in the absence of categorical requirements state and local educators would not ensure that special populations received equal educational opportunities. Based on this same belief, these pieces of legislation included a requirement for some form of parent or community involvement, typically in the decisionmaking process through some form of council. The rationale for the community participation mandate was summed up well by Robert Kennedy in his testimony in favor of Head Start:

> The institutions which affect the poor--education, welfare, recreation, business, labor--are huge complex structures operating outside their control...[We] must basically change these organizations by building into these programs real representation for the poor in the planning and implementation of the programs: giving them a real voice in their institutions (cited in Piven and Cloward, 1971: 20).

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (now Chapter 1), provides a telling example of the evolution of federal policy on the involvement of parents. Following the logic expressed by Robert F. Kennedy, the original Title I legislation called for "community participation" in the compensatory program. In response to numerous allegations that funds were being misspent (e.g., Martin and McClure, 1969), however, policymakers repeatedly strengthened the participation requirement. By 1970, the U.S. Commissioner of Education required district-level parent councils in all local agencies receiving Title I funds. In 1974, a requirement for school-level councils was added to ensure parents a voice in the program. In 1978, when Congress again reauthorized the legislation, the parent involvement requirements were further strengthened to include specific areas of responsibility for parents and to outline the steps districts and schools had to take to support the involvement of parents (Shields, 1989).

This trend toward stricter requirements for parent involvement in education programs shifted in the early 1980's as the federal government began to favor more state and local control of programs. For example, the 1981 reauthorization of Title I deleted the formal requirement for parents, replacing it with a simple call for "consultation with parents." Subsequent reauthorizations and regulations, while clarifying congressional intent that parents be involved in the program, have never reinstated the formal requirements of the earlier legislation.

In fact, during the 1980s, as the earlier concern with bringing excluded groups into the political process of educational decisionmaking waned, policymakers showed a renewed interest in involving parents more directly in their children's education, especially in support roles at home. Policies promoting support roles for parents also go back to the early Head Start legislation and are based on the simple facts that parents are children's first and primary teachers, for even school-age children spend just over a tenth of their time in formal institutions of learning (Walberg, 1984). Thus, throughout the 1980's, programs such as Parents As Tutors (PAT) gained increasing prominence and were adopted in many local communities.

Importantly, research has shown the effectiveness of home support programs in promoting gains in student achievement. Even parents with minimal formal education can be taught a variety of techniques (e.g., reading aloud to their children, tutoring them in different subject areas, or simply listening to their children read) that lead to increased school achievement (Clarke-Sterwart, 1983; Lazar and Darlington, 1978). Although much of this research has been done with very young children, studies have also shown that parents can be trained to offer middle-grade students instructionally related support at home that results in higher achievement (Barth, 1979).

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A key assumption of earlier educational reform movements was a belief that the educational system was working well for some students. The reforms of the Great Society era and the 1970's, by and large, focused on extending opportunities to excluded groups. Even the reforms of the early 1980's, while recognizing some of the shortcomings of the entire educational system, still sought primarily to extend current services to more students for greater periods of time. Thus, for example, during the mid-1980's the most prominent reforms efforts involved increasing graduation requirements, extending the school day, and requiring students to take more academic courses (Smith and O'Day, 1991).

Policies promoting the involvement of parents reflected these same priorities. One stream of policies focused on extending opportunities to the parents of excluded groups. A second stream sought to increase the support at home for what was taking place in the school classroom. Both sets of policies brought parents into supporting roles into the system as it then existed. The next wave of reform in which we are currently makes very different assumptions about the value of the entire system of schooling, and in doing so requires a different set of roles for parents and community members.

The Current School Reform Agenda: Creating New Relationships with Families, Parents and Communities

The current movement to improve the nation's schooling begins with the radically different assumption that our schools are not working very well for any students, so that the entire system needs fundamental changes if we are to prepare youngsters to be productive citizens and workers for the next century. This perspective calls for fundamental shifts in our conceptions of the classroom, of the school, of governance and authority relationships, and of organizational structures supporting schooling.

Bringing Schools and Communities Together

In turn, these changes require a new series of relationships between the classroom and home, between educators and families, and between schools and their broader community. In this section of the paper, I review the major components of the new vision of educational reform and discuss their implications for the involvement of parents and community members in the schooling process.

New Ways of Teaching and Learning: Breaking Down the Barriers between Home and Classroom. At the heart of the current wave of reform is a vision of how teachers and students interact and the content of that interaction. No longer can we be satisfied with wholly teacher-directed instruction focused on the linear acquisition of basic skills structured by a rigid curriculum. Rather, all students must be provided sufficient opportunity to direct their own learning and to become engaged in stimulating, real-world-based, critical problem solving (Knapp and Shields, 1990).

Central to this view is the idea that instruction must be built on students' out-of-school experience and so teachers need to allow students to use these experiences as the starting points for learning. Effective teachers encourage students to use their personal experiences to make sense of classroom content (Diaz, Moll, and Mehan, 1986; Lipson, 1983; Schreck, 1981). To be able to build on their personal experience, teachers must then allow students opportunities to actively direct their own learning (Cohen, 1988; Slavin, 1986). Moreover, helping students to build on their knowledge base is facilitated when teachers learn more about students' home cultures and adapt their teaching approach to incorporate students' cultural characteristics (Au and Jordan, 1980; Heath, 1983; Shields and Wilson, 1992).

Making school relevant to students' real lives is especially important in the middle grades, for it is during these years that students begin to make conscious decisions about the value and appropriateness of specific subject matter and school in general. In short, this is when students turn on or off to school (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Estrada, 1992).

For teaching and learning to change in these ways clearly requires the razing of the artificial barriers between the classroom and the home. Students need to understand the value of out-of-school experiences and feel free to bring those experiences into the classroom. Parents cannot remain ignorant of what takes place in classrooms if they are to facilitate their children's learning. Teachers and administrators cannot remain ignorant of students' home lives if they are to structure appropriate learning experiences.

The destruction of these barriers will require a new openness to communicate, to create opportunities for families to spend more time in the school, and for school staff to spend more time in the community. This is not easily accomplished, but is far from impossible, as evidenced in the following vignette of just such a learning activity in an elementary school in small Appalachian town.

TAPPING THE COMMUNITY'S EXPERTISE:
A VISIT TO THE PUMPKIN PATCH

> *It's a misty, cold morning in South Bernstone, a small coal and farming community in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, and a group of fourth graders are sitting cross-legged in their sweaters and boots engrossed in the "lecture" being given by Mr. McCormick, a local farmer and parent to one of the school's 6th graders. Mr. McCormick is simply describing the process of fertilizing, weeding, and harvesting in this field of pumpkins. Mr. McCormick calls on children in turn who are interested in why bugs do not eat up all the pumpkins and how much money he will make when he brings them to market.*
>
> *This is the class' third visit to the farm--they witnessed some of the seeding and came back to see the new plants sprouting their first fruits. As with their previous visits, the students will go back to school and write essays in small groups for their science class. This time, however, they will also get to bring a pumpkin home, some of which will be cooked in the school kitchen.*

This little story illustrates a number of interesting pedagogical techniques: integration of disciplines, writing across the curriculum, real-world-based learning, and cooperative learning. It also provides a wonderful example of a teacher asking community members to share their expertise with students. Here, the community is viewed as a resource to be used to help students learn important concepts--in ways that send students and parents alike a positive message about the value of schooling and the work of the community.

Bringing Schools and Communities Together

A New Vision of the School House: Forging New Relationships with the Comn ty. A second major theme of the current educational reform movement, which builds on the id real-world-based, student-directed learning, involves a vision of the school as an active learning c munity structured exclusively to enhance student learning. In such "restructured" institutio he day's schedule, the organization of staff and student time, and the roles and responsibilities o chers and administrators are designed explicitly to help students learn (Elmore and Associates, 1990) .

Thus, for example, the length of class periods or the assignment of staff to teaching responsibilities are not seen as "givens" that must structure each day. Rather, teachers in these schools might teach only two or three subjects per day, each class involving teams of teachers working with the same group of students for a length of time, depending on the subject to be covered. In the same vein, "teachers" may play several different roles in such a school, acting as instructors, curriculum developers, and decisionmakers (David and Shields, 1991).

Following this logic, the school building is not viewed as the only location teaching and learning can take place. Based partly on the argument that students need to learn critical thinking within a real-world context, as we discussed above, teachers in such learning communities are likely to design learning experiences that take place outside of the formal school building. Science projects carried out in nearby parks, mathematics projects requiring the timing of bus routes, and writing assignments based on field experiences are examples of appropriate out-of-school learning experiences for children in the middle grades.

Rethinking the basic structure and routines of the school also leads to consideration of the need to provide other services to students. More and more schools are recognizing that their students' ability to learn is contingent on their physical and mental well-being and the well-being of their families. Consequently, schools are experimenting with new ways of providing more integrated services to their communities, wherein the traditional educational function of the school is extended to include specific health and social services (Reisner, Chimerine, Morrill, and Marks, 1991). Schools embarking on integrated service delivery vary considerably in the extent to which they actually provide versus coordinate such services, but the underlying logic remains the same: the structure of the "school" should be defined not by tradition but by the needs of the specific student body.

The implications of such shifts in the traditional structure of schools for bridging the gap between the school and the community are clear. Staff of such schools are open to leaving the school building to promote educational activities for their students in their own communities. Such steps increase the opportunity for community members to become acquainted with the schools as well as for school staff to know the community better. At the same time, by structuring schools to meet the broader needs of the students' families through the provision of noneducational services, teachers and administrators are opening their doors to the broader community and explicitly expressing their desire to help community members. Thus, restructuring in these ways can both bring the school to the community and attract the community to the school.

Again, breaking down the long-standing barriers between school and community and asking teachers, parents, and even students to assume new roles is no easy task. The following vignette shows how the traditional lines between school and home, teacher and parent can be crossed in ways that promote student learning and increase communication and understanding. In this story, we see how parents, trained in giving classes in mathematics, can attract and interest other parents in coming to school after hours to take part in interesting learning experiences with their fifth- and sixth-grade children.

PARENTS AS TEACHERS OF PARENTS:
FAMILY MATH IN A CALIFORNIA BORDERTOWN

> *In the front of the room is a Venn diagram on blackboard; toward the back of the room is a table with various-sized jars filled with beans and M & M's for estimation exercises. A group of 15 parents and their children are sitting around uncomfortably parents not accustomed to sitting in chairs designed for ten-year-olds students not us to having their parents at school with them.*
>
> *At the front of the room, four local parent-leaders and one classroom teacher make last minute preparations for the class. One parent-leader quiets the crowd and quickly launches into the first activity of the evening. Scissors and paper are handed out and parent child teams are asked to form a series of shapes. It's not difficult, the children enjoy cutting and everyone can make a couple of shapes from the pieces, while the best can form dozens. Slowly the tension in the room dissipates as all are playing a fun game. The parent leaders come around to help everyone clean up and to make sure that everyone has some shapes and paper to take home to continue the "geometry lesson."*
>
> *The next exercise involves measurement. Everyone is given a string and asked to cut it to match the partner's height (each adult is paired with a child). The parent-leaders then ask the class to estimate how many times the string will wrap around a partner's wrist, head, and waist. Glancing around the room, one notices that families, which an hour earlier appeared afraid of the experience, are standing on tables, wrapping strings around one another, pinching each other's fat, laughing--and being introduced to concepts of estimation, measurement, and spatial reasoning. (Shields and David, 1988).*

School-Based Governance: New Opportunities for Parent and Community Participation. A third theme of the current reform movement is school-based governance, based on the argument that if schools are to structure themselves to become true learning environments, the individuals closest to the students must have the authority to make fundamental decisions about how best to serve students (David, 1989). The establishment of true authority at the school site has implications both for the direct involvement of community members in the decisionmaking process and for accountability to the immediate community for the school outcomes.

The ideas underlying school-based governance can be traced back to the research on effective schools and the findings that well-functioning schools had staff that were consciously assessing their schools' needs and developing coherent plans to address those needs (Purkey and Smith, 1983). The resulting effective schools movement sought to organize such self-reflective activities in a formal committee structure. Some states, such as California, formalized such councils in state-funded school improvement initiatives.

Unlike these effective schools councils or other forms of parent, teacher, and community advisory councils, school-based governance involves the formal transfer of power from a higher level of government, to the school. In school-based governance, individuals at the school site do not just advise superiors, they possess the authority to make key instructional, organizational, and budgetary decisions, within legal guidelines.

Along with this new authority come a host of new responsibilities. First, school staff must decide how decisions will be made at the school site. The common strategy is to create steering committees made up of representatives of the key groups in the school community: administrators, teachers, and parents. Educators realize that the logic of having decisions made by those "closest to the children" compels them to include parents in school-based governance.

A second domain of responsibility involves accountability. Having assumed authority for making key decisions, schools should be held accountable for their results. Partly, this accountability is to the higher levels of the system from whom the school received the authority. Thus, for example, in Kentucky's new educational reform law, schools are provided more power over their own operations, but every two years they must meet a state-established standard based on their students' performance on a state-developed test. If schools fare poorly enough, they can be taken over by "distinguished educators" appointed by the state.

At the same time, this "authority for accountability" swap creates a new relationship between the school and the immediate community of parents and families. If schools have responsibility for creating the learning environment, then they are also accountable for their results to their most immediate constituents and consumers: local community members. Not surprisingly, Kentucky's reform law includes a provision that allows parents to transfer their students from failing neighborhood schools at no cost to themselves.

Thus, school-based governance, a centerpiece of current reforms, reshapes the relationship between the community and the school in two fundamental ways. First, it creates the opportunities for parents and community members to have more direct input into the decisionmaking process than was typically possible under any earlier governance arrangements. Here, parents can sit on, elect representatives to, and attend the meetings of the decisionmaking bodies of the school. Second, this same structure therefore makes the schools more readily accountable to the community. In certain renditions of school-based governance, this accountability is strengthened by a parental-choice provision.

In sum, moving authority down to the school site through school-based governance can work to democratize the educational decisionmaking process and create meaningful opportunities for parents to influence the outcomes of that process. Under these circumstances, the provision of school choice to parents can further strengthen their political power in local schools.

The following story is an example of how parents can play an active role in the decisionmaking process of a school. This example is taken from a large urban school system that has implemented both school-based decisionmaking and a controlled-choice program, which allows parents some opportunity to choose among the schools their children attend. Here, the staff and parents of two poorly performing schools, a middle school and a high school that share the same campus, are working on rebuilding the schools from the bottom up.

DESIGNING A NEW SCHOOL FROM THE BOTTOM-UP: PARENTS, TEACHERS, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS WORKING TOGETHER

> *A group of eleven teachers, four parents, and two administrators are sitting around a large conference table in Mohawk Middle School's administrative offices. The design team, as they are called, is trying to rethink the structure of the middle school and the high school, which share a common campus. The two Mohawk schools have been at the bottom of the district's ranking on every conceivable indicator of success*

> *(attendance, achievement, dropout rate, etc.). At the urging of a couple of active teachers and parents, the district has handed over considerable responsibility to the school to redesign its educational program. The design team, elected by peers, has the task of making the tough decisions.*
>
> *At the heart of the discussion today is a proposal to form teams of teachers who will have collective responsibility for the education of a small set (around 100) students. One teacher notes, "I like the idea--but it's not feasible unless the team of teachers and students are all located on one wing of the building. In my case, I would have to move--and I have spent 15 years creating a wonderful learning environment in my classroom. I don't want to have to move." A parent responds, "Are you forgetting what our job here is? We're trying to create a school that works for children--not trying to make teachers' jobs easier. If you need help moving, I'll get some other parents to come in on Saturday and we'll give you a hand." There was a moment of silence and then the discussion returned to the educational issues involved in restructuring the school.*

New Requirements for the System Supporting Schooling. A final theme of the current reform agenda concerns the support system around the school, including the district, the state, the federal government, and the local community. In calling for the transformation of the classroom, of the schoolhouse, of relations between home and school, and of the authority structures governing each of these, we are asking much of teachers and school-level administrators. If we expect school staff to assume their new roles of teacher/facilitators, administrator/ coordinators, decisionmakers, and curriculum developers, they will need significant levels of support.

Such support comes first in the form of technical assistance and staff development--helping school staff to understand and prepare for their new roles. In one study, we have found teachers spending over 160 hours per year on additional formal training to gain the skills they need to change their classrooms and schools (Shields, forthcoming). Thus, a second type of support school staff need is time--time to broaden their teaching repertoires, time to plan with other teachers, and time to participate in the decisionmaking process.

Such assistance represents an extremely large financial investment --for example, if schools were to provide all staff with an additional 80 hours of staff development (half what is needed in the schools I am currently studying), schools' annual budgets could easily rise by five percent.

Bringing Schools and Communities Together

Another type of support needed by school staff results from teachers' and administrators' need to craft a school program built on real-world experience and needs. If schools are expected to prepare the next generation of workers, for example, they need to know the required skills for the workplace. Thus, they need ongoing access to and feedback from the business community--not in written reports but through direct communication. Similarly, if we expect teachers to constantly reconsider their activities, they need access to new ideas in the field of pedagogy and in specific subject areas. Again, this access has to be ongoing and fairly easy.

Taken together, these requirements for more technical assistance, time, and access to business and research require a new definition of schools relationship with their broader communities. Here community is not limited to individual parents and community members in the schools' immediate neighborhoods. Rather I am referring to the larger community of a metropolitan area of region, including, those active in business and research. Connections to this broader community are necessary not only because of the need for concrete knowledge, but also to garner the necessary political will to support the massive effort that will be required to change our schools and to keep them improving.

In short, the project of creating self-reflective, constantly improving schools will never take place if the school community tries to so in isolation. Only with the financial and political resources of the full community will school staff ever have a chance of meeting the challenging goals set forth in the current reform agenda.

Policy Recommendations

As the above discussion makes clear, current efforts to reform schooling force us to reconsider both the basic structures and routines of the school and the traditional relationships between the home, community and schools. *Thus, the first set of recommendations to policymakers and practitioners alike concerns the need to reconceptualize "parent involvement," so that:*

- ***Parent involvement comes to mean parent, family, neighborhood, and community involvement.*** Those with stakes in local schools go beyond the immediate guardians of a school's student body.

- ***Family and community involvement is no longer seen as "us against them,"*** with the community as the outsider fighting against the professional school staff, or the staff trying to protect the school from the community. Rather, we need to consider families, communities, and professional staff as members of the same team working toward the same general purposes.

- ***Family and community involvement involves a wide range of activities,*** necessarily going beyond support for learning in the home.

- ***There is no "correct" form of family and community involvement.*** Participation will naturally vary from place to place, such variation should be respected.

Working from these basic premises, we can develop *a set of more specific recommendations regarding state, district, and federal policies to support family and community involvement. Policymakers should:*

- ***Provide schools significant flexibility.*** Policymakers should avoid overly prescriptive requirements--for example, defining the specific areas parents have to be involved in and outlining how many times a certain activity has to take place.

- ***Develop policies within the context of broader reform agenda.*** Family and community involvement should not be viewed as a project to be accomplished or a program to be implemented, nor should it be considered as separate from more sweeping attempts to change schools. One clear lesson of the research on educational change over the past few years is that shifts in the relationship between the home and school form an integral part of shifts in instruction, governance policies, and accountability mechanisms. So, for example, we should not think restructuring leads to changes in parent involvement, nor do changes in parent involvement lead to restructuring. Rather restructuring involves changes in all structures and relationships, including those involving the community.

- ***Utilize the power of the bully pulpit.*** Changing schools from the bottom-up and creating new relationship between schools and their communities are extremely difficult tasks. Educators need to be convinced that such changes are essential; the public needs to be convinced of the importance of supporting these changes. High-level leaders (federal and state policymakers, district superintendents and school board members) can exercise significant influence by identifying themselves with the needed changes, "selling" them, and building the necessary political coalitions.

- ***Assist schools to develop the capacity to involve families and communities.*** Asking school staff and community members to assume new roles *vis a vis* one another requires skills that many do not possess. One of the most effective roles played by higher level policymakers is helping locals develop their own capacity to create these new relationships. Such capacity building involves the provision of staff and parent development, the dissemination of effective models, and expenditure of the funds necessary to release school staff from other responsibilities and to reimburse some community members for their time.

- ***Give policies enough time to work.*** Again, the tasks we are expecting schools and communities to accomplish are formidable ones. One clear mistake policymakers have made in the past is to expect change to happen quickly and then to shift policy in midcourse before schools have had time to really change.
- ***Include policies that provide the community a decisionmaking voice at the school site.*** As districts and states provide schools more authority over key instructional, budgetary, and personnel decisions, parent and community members have to be given a voice in that process.
- ***Hold schools accountable to their communities.*** Schools must be accountable to their immediate constituents. Policymakers need to ensure that families and communities are kept informed of the progress of their schools and that, after a certain period of time, parents should be provided a no-cost option of choosing other schools if their current schools are not working.

Recommendations for Further Research

These policy recommendations suggest a number of directions for further research in the area of family and community involvement. ***First, researchers always should look at the issue of family and community involvement within the whole school environment.*** That is, we will learn less by studying the involvement of parents in the school in isolation than we will by asking, "What are the goals and the trajectory of this school, and how does family and community involvement fit into this pattern?"

Second, researchers should examine all types of parent involvement at one time, not isolating one from another. For example, if a school develops a new home tutoring program, we should look at this program alongside other opportunities (or lack thereof) for families and community members to participate at the school site.

Third, researchers need to develop more complex theoretical models of the effects of parent involvement. Too often, we find ourselves searching for effects (did test scores go up with more participation of parents on the school council?) that we cannot reasonably expect to tie directly to the participation of families and community members. Given a more coherent theoretical model, we could make a more convincing case for the impact of family and parent communication on various aspects of the schooling process, which in turn might lead to certain student-level outcomes.

Finally, researchers have to provide examples of effective practice to the practitioners who go out of their way to open their schools and classrooms to us. Good models of how to involve families and communities in meaningful ways are not readily available to many teachers and administrators. Given the privilege of researchers' access, we should be prepared to return to practitioners' concrete evidence of our findings.

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